

# A SENSE OF TIME

An Exploration of Time in  
Theory, Experience and Art

S. H. VATSYAYAN

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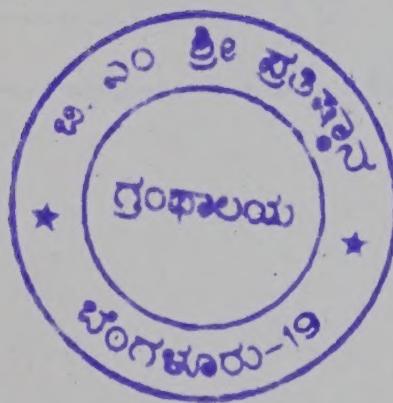
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in Theory, Experience and Art

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S. H. VATSYAYAN



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## Note

In the spring of 1972 the author was invited to deliver a series of lectures at the University of Rajasthan in a newly instituted lecture chair named after Dr A.G. Stock who was former Professor of English in the University till 1960. Four lectures on the subject of Time in Literature were delivered: the first three in English, the fourth, using profuse illustrative material from Hindi literature, in Hindi.

These lectures are now presented in a form suitably revised for a reading public. It has been the author's effort to preserve the spoken form as far as possible, though voice, tone and distance have naturally demanded some modification for the altered situation. The fourth lecture has, however, been substantially revised in terms of content also. Readers of Hindi may find it interesting to refer to additional material in two books published during the interval: *Samvatsara* (National Publishing House, New Delhi, 1976) and *Alavala* (Rajkamal Prakashan, 1973; republished by National Publishing House, 1977).

The author's indebtedness to the University of Rajasthan is gratefully acknowledged.



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## Cosmic Time and The Time Order of History

The title of this work is of course designed to intrigue the reader. Some may immediately doubt my competence to handle a theme of such vast and varied import as the sense of time. While I share all the doubts and questions that may arise in any reasonably intelligent reader's mind on the subject, I do not intend to skirt any of the doubts or evade the questions: indeed I propose to raise and discuss them myself. The reason for this procedure is simple. As a writer I cannot but be deeply concerned with these problems and even more deeply involved in the exploration of the human experience of time and the presentation and communication of that experience. And by 'writer', I mean not only the writer of fiction, whose concern with narrative or the realistic presentation of events should be obvious; I mean also the poet, for the poem also is a happening in time and the manipulation as well as the experience of time is an essential part of poetic creation and communication. The argument might be extended to all the arts: the application to music might be obvious but considerations of time could also fruitfully be raised with regard to painting or sculpture.

I should also make it clear that I do not propose to deal with my subject academically: I shall try to preserve the image of the writer and for this I shall first make an attempt to bring the reader into the ambit of an *experience of time* in the special and limited sense in which I propose to deal with it subsequently. If it should seem a little like beating about the bush initially, I hope it will eventually be clear that I beat about the bush somewhat as hunters do, to bring their quarry into the open, so that it may be shot at and, with luck, bagged and brought home. Or, to change the metaphor, that Time itself is 'the burning bush' and beating about it a necessary part of the process of defining and circumscribing it for my purpose.

Some time ago, driving from Jodhpur to Delhi, I stopped for a short rest in a hilly tract dotted with hamlets of sheep-herding families. I had a dog and a friend with me; as the dog was restive I

asked my friend to walk him a little while I relaxed and refreshed myself for a few more hours of driving. The man walked on along the road, and I was to pick him and the dog up a little later. I drove for over a mile but saw no sign of either the man or the dog. As it seemed very unlikely that they could have gone farther, I wondered whether I should turn back and look for them again or go yet a little farther. Just then I saw two young men sitting on the road embankment: shepherds, from the way they leaned on their sticks, with a herd grazing in the scrubby slope beyond the road. I asked them if they had seen a man go by, leading a dog on a leash. The older of the two opened his eyes wide and answered, 'No, I haven't—not I; I've never seen one and I've lived all my life here.' Well, I turned back and found the dog and man within a couple of furlongs: they had got off the road and I had missed them at a sharp turn. I picked them up and drove on to Delhi.

But having found the dog, I realized I had picked up a problem too, to which I had to find an answer. I thought to myself as I drove along: Had I put the same question to a man on the roadside in Delhi or Bombay, how would he have answered me? He would probably have said, 'Who's bothered about dogs on the road? We see them by the dozen every day—can't keep check' or something to that effect. For the city man, the sight of a man walking a dog would have been an occurrence in his daily routine; for the shepherd it was an event in his life. He hadn't seen the man-and-dog, but if he had, it would have been an event to measure in terms of his whole life.

One conclusion was of course obvious: that the shepherd had had a very uneventful life. I could have given rein to my social conscience and asked myself what could be done to ameliorate the conditions of his life, to make it less monotonous, etc. But the problem that stayed with me had a more immediate bearing on my own vocation: that I am a novelist; I want this man as a reader, quite as much as I want the city man to be my reader. But what or how can I write so that it may seem true to both of them in terms of their life experience? They live in two different orders of time; therefore the meaningfulness of an event—indeed even the definition of the term 'event'—is different for them. How do I bridge this time gap? Or do I decide not to, and abandon one audience? Or do I write in several different ways, stories set in different time orders? How do I make my experience of time real? Is there *Time*, or are there many times? Consequentially, is there realism, or are there many orders of realism? Does that mean that there is not one reality but many orders of reality? From which I

came back to my first question—what or how do I write so that my work may encompass all, or at least several, orders of reality, seem *true* to all or at least several categories of readers? How ‘true’ is truth in Art?

Visiting a family, I was introduced to the younger members as ‘a writer of stories’. At night, therefore, I was called upon to tell a story to the youngest child: he wouldn’t sleep otherwise! I was able to cook one up on the spot—from fragments remembered from my own childhood, plus bits and pieces of fairy tales read and reread at different times, plus a little pure improvisation as I went along. To my relief and the parents’ pleasure, the child enjoyed the concoction and nodded off to sleep with a happy glow on his face. The following night I had to repeat the performance. Anticipating the summons I had prepared myself with a couple of new stories, but as it happened I was caught even more unawares than on the first evening. The child would have none of the ‘new’ stories; he wanted the same story that I had told him the night before. Now, since this story had no fixed content (for me, that is) and had been concocted on the spur of the moment, I couldn’t remember all the details. I, therefore, proceeded to improvise afresh. But the child would have none of it. He wanted *exactly* the same story, told *exactly* the same way. His memory was perfect—and perfectly ruthless. The slightest deviation on my part was pounced upon, corrected and, to my discomfiture, followed by a reprimand: ‘What sort of a grown-up and famous writer of stories was I, if I couldn’t tell a child’s story straight?’ I accepted the reprimand humbly, but once protested: ‘Why do you want *me* to tell the story when you know it perfectly well already?’ To the child it was a very stupid question because I had given the answer myself. He wanted the story told that way because he knew it that way—why else?

I do not know if readers who have had a similar experience have resolved it the same way, or been led to a fresh problem in the attempt at resolution. The child wants the known story retold exactly the same way because thus he re-lives a pleasurable experience; more, *he recreates the world* which the first narration has helped him envision. In other words, he has put the events of the story in a timeless dimension and wishes the narrator each time to turn the key to the door which opens on this timeless world. If that is the solution, then the problem I am left with is this: Is there a timeless dimension? What does it mean—a timeless order of time? And if

there is such an order of time, must the experience of it, the possibility of living and re-living in it, be limited to the child? Is our loss of innocence as adults so absolute that these ‘intimations of immortality’ are lost to us forever? Is the child’s world only a world of delusion, or is it also an order of reality? Does my experience of reality comprehend and compass it, or do I leave it alone? Why? Because of its irrelevance, or out of a sense of incapacity or defeat? Must we, as we grow (grow either ‘adult’ or modern) discover Time and lose Eternity?

A third and a fourth anecdote; these are about events almost certainly quite familiar to readers in their own day-to-day experience. And because they must be such, it might be profitable to use the historic present rather than the past tense in narrating them.

I come home from a walk and am told that a friend had been to see me. Since it is a friend I very much want to meet, I ask eagerly, ‘When was it? How long ago?’ The answer is: ‘Oh, just now—he can hardly have gone past the road junction.’ You will observe that my question is about *time*, while the answer is in terms of *distance*. How does the fact that a man is a certain distance away tell me when he was where I am?

Again, I am hiking in the hills, along a track on which distances are not marked. I meet a man going in the opposite direction and ask him: ‘How far is ‘X’ (the place I am heading for)?’ He looks at his watch and answers, ‘Oh, I expect you’ll get there by tea-time.’ You will observe that this time my question is about *distance*, and the answer is in terms of *time*, and a special kind of time. Now this had happened in the Lake District in England, and I know that the Englishman measures not only time but also distance in terms of intervals between meals. Since we always measure the unknown in terms of the certainly known, I might legitimately infer that the fact that the Englishman measures time and distance with his appetite as a determinant shows that food is the more important part of his world of empirical realities. But how does that inference help *me*? How does the fact that I am eating at a certain place, tell me how far it is from a place I was at earlier in the day?

And yet, actually we are all doing this all the time: indeed we use even stranger measuring standards for both time and space, i.e., distance. ‘How far is it to Ajmer?’ ‘It costs three rupees by bus’—or seven by luxury coach—if you wish at the same time to suggest that you only travel by the latter as befits your social rank. ‘Why are you

so late coming to the office?'—'The water had stopped running in the tap.'

Indeed, even when we look at a clock, aren't we using a spatial measure for time? It is noon when both the hands are in a certain position—in space; it is three o'clock when they are in another particular position—in space! How does the orientation of two metal pointers on a dial tell us anything about what time *is*—or even about our experience of time?

The reader may recall that in presenting my third and fourth anecdotes I said I would use the 'historic present': history by any definition is a record of an irreversible uni-directional movement, so isn't the term 'historic present' meaningless? History, being a record, is necessarily one of past events; how do I make the past present? Do I merely create an illusion—is it merely a verbal trick, or is my experience of time itself a delusion? How can I even say that it is *I* that experience, except on the basis of my experience of *time*? Do not I become aware of selfhood, of duration and continuity as a self, of myself as experiencer, as '*I*', through my experience of time? And what is meant when I say 'I experience time'?

What is time? That is the burning bush around which I have been beating, in order to draw the quarry out of cover. Time is the burning bush, Time is also the quarry. And perhaps it would not be wrong to say, even if the metaphors do get a little mixed, that Time is the Hunter too.

What is Time? The interesting thing about that question is that we all know the answer to it till the question is put to us. Some readers will recall St Augustine's confession of his dilemma: 'What, then, is time? If no one asks me, I know; if I wish to explain to him who asks, I know not.'

It is not my purpose to explore the philosophy or the metaphysic of time; nor do I have any competence for that sort of exploration. Nor am I concerned, at any rate not primarily, with the scientific definition of time. But in so far as even the experiential reality of time is conditioned and modified by current philosophical concepts and contemporary scientific knowledge about the nature of time, no discussion of *human* time—i.e., time as experienced by us—can altogether ignore or exclude science or philosophy, or speculative thought with either bias. Indeed, we cannot even limit ourselves to contemporary philosophy or science, but have to keep in mind the history of the development of ideas also, particularly in our consideration of literature. Literature, as a product of the whole culture of a

people at a certain time, must necessarily reflect the cosmology of the culture at that time, also the self-view or identity of that people at that time. The *cultural significance* of even the most direct experience of time will vary from culture to culture. To put the same idea differently, the experience with which literature concerns itself is not an isolated experience of an isolated individual organism *in vacuo*, but a multi-layered, multi-faceted complex, determined by more than one coordinate of time.

I do not wish to confuse the issues by raising too many of them at once; also I would like to save myself from unnecessary repetition, but it might be helpful to make just a passing reference here to the fact that a work of art carries the impress of the time-experience of the reader as well as the writer—to say nothing of the time-experience of the characters in the work of art. Any work of art—story, poem, painting, sculpture, musical composition—is an *event*, a happening in time: a contemporary poet has even called a poem an Emergency. In a story or novel, what happens *in* the story, i.e. to or amongst the characters, is an event or a series of events; what happens in the novelist, i.e., the creative process, is also an event or a series of events; and finally what happens in the reader, i.e., the process of communication, is also an event or a sequence of events. And all these events are inescapably bound up with the experience of time, i.e., with human time, which has little, or only very indirect, connection with what we might for convenience call ‘objective’, or ‘real’ time, knowing full well that none of these terms will really stand up to close scrutiny.

Let us, however, briefly review our present state of knowledge regarding time: knowledge rooted in the scientific approach. Science recognizes the validity of a psychological description of time; it even finds it convenient to start from that point. Our senses present their perceptions to us in the order of time; it is through these perceptions that we participate in the general flow of time which passes through the universe, producing event after event. We are placed in the centre of the flow, which we call the present. But what is now the present slides inexorably into the past, while we move along to a new present—or rather the flow causes us to be at a new centre which we now rename the present. We thus remain in an eternal Now, perceiving continually its flowing into the past. We cannot stop the flow; even more important, we cannot alter the direction of its flow. The flow of time is uni-directional and irreversible.

The mathematical scientist tries to steer clear of the emotional part of our experience of time, and concentrates on observation of 'the objective structure of the time relation'. He concerns himself first with the metric of time. But what is the validity of his very first assumption for proceeding to measure time—that the flow of time is *uniform*? This assumption has nothing to do with our sense perceptions: psychological time moves in anything but a uniform flow—it runs, it drags, it hangs heavy, there are times when it stands still.... How then does the mathematician proceed to measure time and determine equal intervals? His first control clock is the earth's rotation. But is that uniform? No. Since the earth's orbit round the sun is elliptical, solar time is not quite uniform. The mathematician then proceeds to correct this by reference to a second clock, using very distant stars as reference; this provides the means for correcting *solar time*. But this new standard, *sidereal time*, is not absolutely uniform either. Because of the earth's precession—a sort of nodding movement which we can also observe in a spinning top—there is still an element of variability in the flow. The precession is a very slow movement—one complete turn taking about 25,000 years—but it is enough to reduce uniformity of flow to a convention if not a fiction of mathematics. Strictly speaking there is no uniform time; what is defined as such is, to quote a modern scientific philosopher<sup>1</sup>, 'Some time flow projected into observable data by reference to mathematical equations'.

Are these equations in their turn valid? All that the mathematician will claim is that 'they express the laws of mechanics, and are derived from the observation of nature'. How do we test or verify these observations? By having recourse to a reference time, that is to say, a uniform time, because unless there is an observable uniform time we have no way of checking if the laws of mechanics are true. Thus we have arrived at circular reasoning: to have uniform time we must know the laws of mechanics; to know the laws of mechanics we must have uniform time.

The scientist, of course, recognizes this fact. He finds a way out of the dilemma by making it clear that uniform time is established only by definition, not by cognition. There is no absolutely uniform time that we can know of; two intervals of time are thus not known to be equal, they are only called equal.

So much for the first of the scientist's concerns. His second line of

<sup>1</sup>Hans, Reichenbach, *The Rise of Modern Philosophy*

approach is consideration of the order of time; of the temporal sequence of events. His premise here is causality. Effects must have causes and causes must precede effects; furthermore these temporal processes are irreversible. Here again, though this 'historicism' has become an essential part of all contemporary thinking and theorizing about time, the divergence between scientific formulation and human experience is so great and even irreconcilable, that the scientist has to limit his claims or make concessions to speculative thought starting from human experience. There is no logical necessity for temporal sequence; a serial order of events is not logically necessary and we could still conceive of a world in which causality does not inevitably lead to an order of 'earlier' and 'later'. In other words, 'historicism' is not a logical necessity. In such a world past and future could co-exist. What the scientist claims is only that it is an empirical fact that our world is not such; that *in our empirical world time-order reflects the causal order of the universe.*

Let us pause for a moment and reassess that statement, as we shall need to return to the discrepancies between the temporal implication of causality in subjective and in objective terms; i.e., the objective or external time order and the subjective or internal time order. Causes precede effects; but it is a psychological fact that, more often than not, the mind registers events in what 'objectively' is a reverse order: the 'effect' cognitively precedes the 'cause'. In other words the psychological event takes place in a counter-clockwise time—'later' happens before 'earlier'. Thus what is 'psychologically simple and directly given' is not logically clear and valid; on the other hand what is logically clear and valid may be psychologically false and meaningless. Experience is not reliable in scientific terms; logic may not be meaningful in psychological terms. Do we then dismiss the evidence of our senses as illusion, while at the same time claiming that that dismissal is based on empirical considerations? Or do we concede that there are (not merely 'could be' but are) separate orders of reality and that science only limits itself to one of these orders?

The scientists' concern with temporal sequence leads to another problem of considerable interest. This interest may in the first instance seem only of academic significance, but when we realize its implications for our concepts of reality, and see the workings of those implications in the contemporary treatment of reality in literature, we are led to recognize its importance in our total view of the reality of the cosmic order and our own place in that order.

This problem is the problem of simultaneity. If causality leads us

to questions of 'earlier' and 'later', it must also raise the question of 'at the same time' or 'simultaneous'. Now science cannot establish or determine the simultaneity of any two events. To determine simultaneity we must determine the speed of light; but to determine the speed of light we must have two points of reference in time at the *same time*, i.e., we must know simultaneity. We have again the circular argument. Einstein broke the dilemma—or rather found a mathematically defensible evasion—by positing a 'relative simultaneity'. Just as the scientist begins with a hypothesis of time as uniform flow and comes to concede that the flow is not really uniform but only conceptually so; similarly he begins with the hypothesis of a uniform speed of light and bases his subsequent reasoning on the recognition that that speed is not uniform. But if simultaneity is relative, i.e., in common idiom, if of two events which happened 'at the same time' one could have happened *before* the other, then 'earlier' and 'later' are also relative, i.e., 'historic' sequentiality is also relative. The mathematician does insist that though simultaneity is relative there are certain limits which cannot be transgressed: that the causal sequence cannot be transcended, for the causal process which constitutes this world is the flow of time. The common man is left with a semantic problem which understandably colours his whole concept of reality.

In what way, then, do we gain by erecting an 'objective structure of the time relation'? We have what might, in an attempt to relate it to experience, be called our 'public time', the time we use with the aid of watches and calendars 'to synchronize our private experiences of time for the purpose of social action and communication'. In other words we achieve a time which is independent of how we personally experience the flow of time and which has inter-subjective validity. It also provides us the means and a method for arranging the facts of history in a meaningful way. Furthermore it provides us with a convenient—and now apparently indispensable—measure of a vast variety of social, technological and economic actions and processes. Time is of supreme value because it produces things of value in terms of the material conditions of life, and in terms of the production of marketable goods. Time is money: time is the most important commodity because it makes possible the production of all commodities. This interpretation or evaluation of time is modern in the same way as the sense of history to which I have just referred is modern. Not only is time a commodity in the modern world; we even talk of 'man-hours' in commodity terms, which means that

man also has become a commodity. Historic time has tended to reduce man to a fragmentary existence; economic time has reduced him to a saleable commodity. Technological man, thus, might almost be compared to a can of processed—or let us be a little more fastidiously precise and say processable—meat.

How could such a state fail to be reflected in literature? In actual fact contemporary literature shows an intense pre-occupation with time; we can even recognize a sequential movement, with literature always a step or two ahead because the artist could intuitively assess the human predicament resulting from any new view of the nature and reality of time. Predicament is by definition situation in time; the artist's reaction to the human situation was intuitively ahead and quite often the theorist was led to his hypothesis by some presentation of man's orientation in the modern world in a literary work. Some readers may recall Freud's admission in this connection: 'The poets and philosophers before me discovered the unconscious; what I discovered was the scientific method by which the unconscious can be studied.'

But how did history come to such a pass in the modern, that is, the Western world? The qualification is useful not to disparage the East or to record a bias against modernity, but, first, in pursuit of that very 'historicism' which has been the chief villain of the piece, and secondly to suggest that we, the East, are perhaps also fortunate in our present 'pre-modern' state because though impelled inexorably in the same direction as the West, we still have the possibility of contact with dimensions totally lost to life in the West. What we shall do with those possibilities is our own concern; one may reflect sadly that we shall probably do no better because we shall go on insisting on travelling exactly the same road as the West in the belief that that is the only road to what used to be called 'progress' and recognized as a value. But the fact of the possibility remains; what also remains is our capacity to find in the arts, and especially in literature, a richer enjoyment and a deeper affirmation of life. But to return for the present to history, and to the rather gloomy consequences of confining life to the historic dimension only.

The modern Western world began with a series of radical social changes which gradually revolutionized the entire range of human preoccupations, actions, urges and beliefs. Radical reorientations in science and technology, political revolutions, religious reformations, an artistic and literary renaissance and finally the economic revolutions of capitalism and communism; all these had profound

effects on the concept of time in human experience. Not only that, time as the historic process also changed the meaning of 'truth', making it subject to historic laws. The verities, certitudes and securities of faith were destroyed; what replaced it was the law of relentless change and transitoriness.

History destroyed eternity. The dimension of eternity had been an integral part of the ancient and medieval picture of man. At the highest level eternity was envisaged in a religious or God-centred framework: one lived in the city of God and with an assurance of eternal life; next there was a philosophical framework of eternal truths, values and pursuits of ends; at the lowest or most mundane level was a social framework of fixed and apparently permanent social and political structures. The vast and astonishing patterns of change in human history, the wonderful new dimensions opening up before man in *this* world, obscured the dimensions of eternity and led to its decline and gradual collapse. The horizons of eternal life were lost; man began to live more and more in the dimension of human history in this changing world; time began to be experienced more and more as constant change. Not stability but change became the basic value. Earlier, city planners had worried how to *preserve* the older parts of the city, the new planner talked gleefully of urban renewal!

Eternity survived as a concept, but only in the religious outlook which increasingly lost its force, function and significance in the context of social and historical actuality. Eternity had become a 'belief', still 'held' but with little correspondence to reality.

The adoption of the quantitative metric of time in science—clocks and chronometers—was independent of the decay of the dimension of eternity, but a parallel development. The consequences of precision in observation and measurement not only led to the triumph of physics as an exact science but had various other repercussions.

The analysis of time—of the temporal continuum—into distinct measurable units had its analogue in the analysis of experience into sensations and impressions: both followed the same model and the same criteria of simplicity, separateness, difference, distinction. This intellectual trend was reinforced by the effects of the processes of production on the meaning of time—by the social factors which affected the status of time in the life of modern man.

As time and experience are broken down into simple and discrete entities, many problems arise. What holds the separate units of time together? What holds the bits and fragments of sense data together?

Why doesn't the world of nature disintegrate? Why doesn't the self disintegrate? What provides structure, continuity and identity? One answer of course was God, as a sort of perpetual carpenter joining and patching up the separate parts of time and experience together in 'continuous creation'. But if we could allow God, we need not have lost eternity in the first instance. Another answer was habit: it was habit which explained causal connections and gave an apparent orderliness and continuity to nature. The same habitual associations residing in memory gave man a sense of personal identity. One may observe in this line of thought the seeds of the fragmentization not only of experience but also of the self: this interpretation of experience does not support the view that the self may be experienced as a continuous internally-related and unified system of thoughts feelings, urges and actions.

With the loss of eternity, time is experienced more and more within the context and order of history; time tends also to be experienced in the direction of history. With no eternal order, truth can no longer be a reflection of such an order; truth therefore becomes a function of the historic process. Time is no longer the medium for the discovery of 'timeless' truths; on the contrary, truth itself is a function of time. History is the only permanent, fixed basis, the criterion on which the various manifestations of truths of different ages or in different cultures can be tested and proven, interpreted and evaluated.

This was the historicism to which I referred earlier. Confined to the dimension of history, human life shrank under the oppressive impact of time. Historic time was the only medium in which human life unfolded and fulfilled itself. It, therefore, unfolded in one direction only. It depended on one's predilection and attitude whether that direction led to an open future of limitless possibility and creation, or toward a closed future of oblivion and death. But whichever end one foresaw, time confronted man with nothing but relentless change and transitoriness.

But this historicism also had a built-in destructive device. Time could not be reconstructed in terms of history; history itself was a patchwork without any 'meaningful' or significant pattern either in intellectual terms or in terms of human aspirations. The world of history was so complex and so fragmentary that its data could not be fitted into any pattern. There was no future as there was no teleological purpose or message, and there was no past because there was no evidence of a direction. Either there was no direction at all, or there

were so many directions and none yielding a sense of significance for human aspirations, efforts and values. Is it surprising that a contemporary writer sees history as a mill in which 'the past is being ground to pieces (and) senselessly used up as so much raw material in the fabrication of an unthinkable future'?

This, then, is where not only literature today, but also 'modern' man find themselves. I said a little earlier that I was only presenting the predicament of Western man, and that is what I have done; but I have also said already that most of the East is following the same way. Any suggestion that we are not modern, or modern enough, is resented and leads to a frantic effort at 'correction'; the view that we might make better use of our pre-modern situation and sensibility, so that we do not fall into the sorry mess in which the modern West finds itself, promptly leads one to be labelled 'obscurantist', 'fossilized', 'an old fogey'. But the fact remains that we have many people who live relatively happily in the dimension of time to which my first anecdote about the dog and the shepherd referred; what is more, we have both writers and readers who can still live in and make sense of both the eternal dimension of time as well as the surface temporality of modern history. I have suggested already that this gives us the possibility of a richer existence while the situation endures; for we live sufficiently in the oppressive modern time dimension to realize that this cannot last for ever. I am not suggesting that the West has no such writers—or even readers; indeed those writers of the West who have seen the walls of the cul-de-sac into which they have led themselves are really the West's most significant writers and its hope for man. It is they who have opened up for modern man a possibility of re-establishing contact with a time dimension larger than that of history, overcoming the fragmentization of time and experience which modern society and technology inevitably produces and must produce, and piecing together afresh, re-integrating, the fragmented self of man. A survey of such literature, the problems it has faced and the techniques it has followed to touch the dimension of eternity, will be attempted in a later chapter, where the Indian handling of the timeless dimension as well as the simultaneous handling of temporal dimensions will also be parallelly examined. It should be possible to see from that that we—as also other pre-moderns—have contact with a richer reality, a 'reality-in-depth' it might be called; while the reality of the West has become and is becoming more and more the reality of the surface—witness the contemporary concern of art with surface, texture, etc. But it is

not necessary to anticipate so far ahead. Instead, it may be stimulating to have another question posed to mull over.

The process of historicization (if I may coin such a horrible word for what I am referring to) in the West took place over three or four hundred years. But we in India had been familiar with the notion of fragmentized time and transitory reality for some fourteen hundred years, all fourteen hundred of them before the concept took hold of the West. Why did an equivalent or even analogous process of the splitting of the psyche not take place in India? Was it because the Buddhist philosophers were only speculative thinkers, and their logic did not have the authority of empirical knowledge of reality? Or was it because the non-Buddhist systems, almost equally speculative, nevertheless clung too tenaciously to the eternal time order in which their system of reality was rooted? How similar some of the phraseology of the Buddhist logicians sounds to their contemporary Heraclitus at one end and to the nineteenth century Bergson and the twentieth-century McTaggart at the other!

'We change without ceasing, the state itself is nothing but a change'... The ego 'has no reality', 'there is no essential difference between passing from one state to another and persisting in the same state'... 'Existence is constant change, constant motion, motion alone, absolute motion, motion without any stuff that moves.' Thus Bergson.

'Nothing is really present, past or future. Nothing is really earlier or later than anything else or temporarily simultaneous with it. Nothing really changes. And nothing is really in time. Whenever we perceive anything in time—which is the only way in which, in our present experience, we do perceive things—we are perceiving it more or less as it really is not.' Thus McTaggart.

'All things without exception are nothing but strings of momentary events'... 'Elements of existence are automatically evanescent'... 'Ultimate reality is instantaneous'... 'The totality of causes and conditions of a thing cannot be distinguished from the thing itself'... 'Stability is an illusion.' Thus the Buddhist logicians.

'Existence is nothing but a flow of eternal becoming.' Thus Heraclitus.

Of course, in actual fact the Buddhists and Bergson were on opposite sides in some vital respects. For Bergson it was duration which was real while moments or the time point-instants were artificial cuts in it; for the Buddhists only the instantaneous sensation was real and duration only a construction of the imagination. Indeed, it was

to assert the reality of duration that Bergson attacked the contemporary mechanistic view of time. Bergson's view of the value of life deriving from its very transitoriness is also directly opposed to the Buddhist's negation of life from the same premise. It might also be relevant to mention that the position which Bergson thought he was attacking had already been modified by the classical physicists themselves, so that duration and continuity had become a part of the picture of time in physics.

But the question remains: How was it that, with the continued and persistent presence of the idea of reality as perpetual flux, the view that both time and space were unreal and illusory, we were able to maintain a psyche which was remarkably secure and healthy? Was it only because the Buddhists finally lost the logical battle to the Realists; and the psyche never really felt threatened by the Buddhists' denial of reality to both time and space—duration and extension? Was it that, even in a phenomenal world, the Indian mind could find assurance in the view that both time and space were 'real, substantial, eternal, all-pervading and all-embracing'; that phenomena were 'waves or fluctuations standing out upon a background of eternal all-pervading undifferentiated matter', that they were likewise waves or fluctuations on the ocean of undifferentiated time? Or was it that, regardless of the intellectual wrangling going on around him, the Indian was reassured by the structures and institutions that actually endured? A god-centred religious framework, a truth-centred cosmic framework, a cyclicity-centred cultural framework, a tradition-centred social structure... Was it that 'history' never overtook the Indian till a couple of centuries ago?

The question may provide a suitable line of approach to a consideration of human time or time as experienced by us, the problems that it poses, and the ways in which the problems have been formulated and met or sometimes circumvented in literature and the arts. Human creativity is essentially concerned with human time: it functions in that time, observes and makes us aware of that time, continuously evolves new techniques to record and communicate that time. If modern time is historic time, then the criterion of modern literature is also its awareness and treatment of time. The study of this literature with this in mind is fascinating and rewarding: rewarding in a double sense because it not only gives us the aesthetic pleasure which we justly expect from it, but also because it takes us to the threshold of a new 'mansion of philosophy'—a philosophy which might help us to rediscover truth and value, liberated from the

vassalage to which history seems to have reduced them, and even to rediscover—nay—create time out of the very transitoriness which seems to be its chief function.

As a preamble to that exploration let us examine a Sanskrit verse, and consider briefly the structure of time within it. The verse chosen is not unique or exceptionally distinguished as poetry, but one of a kind frequently found at the beginning of a Sanskrit play. That fact is also significant: the apparent invocatory format is really designed to remind us of the simultaneous movement of several time orders—an essential element of the movement in any play:

*angulya kah kapatam praharati kutilo madhavah kim vasanto  
no cakri kim kulalo nahi dharanidharah kim dvijihvah phanindrah  
naaham ghoraahimardi kimuta khagapatir no harih kim kapindrah  
ityevam Satyabhama-prativac anajitah patu nas cakrapanih*

In its rigorous metrical form it was obviously meant to be and was in fact chanted. But another rendering of the lines, without any change in word-order, will reveal new features. The mode will be more in keeping with a modern time-sense as shown operating in dialogue—in the main, that is, because as I shall argue presently, the essential content is *not* in the dialogue but in a juxtaposition.

‘*Angulya kah kapatam praharti kutilah?*’

‘*Madhavah.*’

‘*Kim Vasantah?*’

‘*No cakri.*’

‘*Kim Kulalah?*’

‘*Nahi Dharanidharah.*’

‘*Kim dvijihvah Phanindrah?*’

‘*Naaham ghoraahimardi?*’

‘*Kimuta Khagapatih?*’

‘*No Harih.*’

‘*Kim Kapindrah?*’

*Ityevam Satyabhama-prativacanajitah patu nah Cakrapanih.*

‘Who knocks on the door so hard?’

‘*Madhava.*’

‘Could it be the spring?’

‘No, the one with the chakra (wheel).’

‘Is it the potter?’

‘No. He who holds up the Earth.’

'What? The two-tongued serpent?'  
 'No! I am the great vanquisher of the snake!'  
 'Really? An eagle?'  
 'No. I am Hari.'  
 'The great Ape?'

*May the lord Chakrapani, thus vanquished in repartee by Satyabhama, protect us.*

The dialogue is not difficult to follow, for the dramatic situation is easily visualized. Krishna has come home late and is being teased by his consort Satyabhama into the subdued repentance appropriate for the defaulting husband on such an occasion. Sanskrit, with its epithetic quality, abounds in words with double meanings; Satyabhama wilfully and perversely chooses the wrong meaning in each of Krishna's utterances till she finally makes a monkey of him. The dialogue in the poem has achieved its purpose; Satyabhama has her triumph and the audience can enjoy Krishna's discomfiture. The poet, and with him the audience, is now prepared for the final and in a sense the operative line of the poem: the invocation or prayer. This provides a working paraphrase of the poem. But is that its meaning? Or content? We cannot get to the true significance of the poem without paying attention to the structure of time within it. There is a dual time as also dual space operating within the poem. The dialogue between divine figures takes place 'out there', in a dimension of space which is peopled by the gods; it also takes place in the eternal dimension of time, for the situation visualized is not historic in the sense that it has occurred and is over. The gods are always there, their little games are endlessly being played, Krishna is eternally recalcitrant and the dialogue goes on for ever. The entreaty in the last line is, however, set in our ordinary mortal time and space; in the this-here-now; hence the prayer, for hence also the need of protection. Thus, of the four-line duration of the poem, three parts turn our attention to divine or eternal time (or the divine space-time continuum), the fourth brings us to human or mortal time (or space-time continuum). In other words, in the structure of the poem itself divine time surrounds, sustains and protects human time, immortality or eternity surrounds and protects mortal existence which is the essential content of the prayer and the poem. To have recognized, in and through the poem, this dual time and the relation of the parts to the whole, is, for the duration of the poem, to have lived simultaneously in the two orders of time, human and divine; it is to have felt

the touch of immortality in a time-bound existence. That is what the Sanskrit poet asked of poetry; no poet could ask for more. How apt that such a verse should form the invocation before a theatrical performance, for drama by its very nature is the most time-bound of arts, and yet classical drama was the form pre-eminently chosen to lead us to that ineffable state in which we could find identity with the Timeless.



## Human Time: The Time Order of Experience

'Time is the basic category of Existence', wrote Heidegger, referring very definitely to time as experienced by the individual. Time is 'the immediate datum of consciousness', said Bergson, focussing his attention also upon time as experienced, and going on from there to the experience of 'duration'.

But at the same time as these thinkers were concentrating upon the qualitative aspect of time, whether in itself or for the implications of that aspect for the human self, science was developing the idea of quantitative units of physical time. Time in these two aspects seemed unrelated and discontinuous. This lack of relationship and discontinuity raised further problems of human identity: while man experiences time as flux or change he also experiences it in terms of the growth of the self. Experientially time and the self are so intimately related that the question 'What is man?' immediately and inevitably converts itself into 'What is Time?' A fragmentized or discontinuous view of time necessarily leads to a discontinuous view of the self and of personality; any attempt to 'put Humpty Dumpty together again' translates itself into the effort to re-integrate time into a continuous whole or flow. But the study of time and the personality together reveals further quirks of the human psyche; for we have to reconcile the fact that 'the self grows in time' with the fact that the same self exhibits the capacity to arrest time, or to touch a static dimension of time utterly inconsistent with the notion of time as flow.

'The events of the unconscious system are timeless', noted Freud, 'they are not ordered in time, are not changed by the passage of time, have no relation whatever to time.' Or again, 'In the Id there is nothing corresponding to the idea of time.'

If the events of the unconscious are timeless, and if the human psyche can repress the memory of events, and if what is repressed also becomes timeless in the same Freudian sense of not being changed by time, what do we make of the experience of time as flow, the experience of direction—a definite direction and also an ir-

reversible one? The experience of time as movement in the direction of death—where do we put it in the scheme of things? Again to quote Heidegger, man alone of all the animals, being self-conscious, had foreknowledge of his own death—or rather the inevitability of death. What may he do with this knowledge?

*Kalo na yato vayameva yatah.*—Bhartrhari

Never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee ...

—John Donne

Time devours our lives.—Baudelaire

The flower that has once blown for ever dies ...—Fitzgerald

(Omar Khayyam)

The course of my life is deathward set.—D.H. Lawrence

I am a sack puffed out with air,

Tied at the mouth with ageing and promised to Death.—Ajneya

I have picked out a few expressions at random, but the fact of this knowledge has been expressed in many ways in many different ages throughout the world. What may man do with the knowledge that he must die? Live in fear? Counter it with the hope of salvation, a life beyond? These courses have been recommended and tried; but it should be obvious that they will only work in a faith-centered system of thought. Not positing God or an afterlife, what may one do? Repress the knowledge, put it into the timeless order of the subconscious, and hope for that kind of liberation? But repression takes its own toll in terms of anxieties. Resort to drugs? That too has been tried, with results that are not better than the neuroses.

Are there positive responses possible? I might quote a few examples, again at random:

‘Time is invention, or nothing at all’ ...—Bergson

‘What I value most is *transitoriness* ... It is the very soul of existence ... Transitoriness creates time—and time is the essence’.—Thomas Mann

Certainly these positive responses are somewhat exceptional and very rare; the more common one is that of the meaninglessness of time or the absurdity of existence, to be met with, at best, by the courage of despair.

The few examples of attitudes towards time given here are all from literature. In literature time is always time in experience; it is different from time in nature and is private, personal, subjective, psychological, human: Bergson’s ‘immediate datum of conscious-

ness'. A little further exploration into this kind of time would be fruitful: perhaps again an anecdote or two might provide examples from real life which after all is what the artist draws upon, even if his imagination or his empathy allows him to use it more effectively.

Some thirty years ago my father related to me a personal experience of his which I have never forgotten. About the turn of the century (that is, some forty years before the narration) as a very young archaeologist, he had been roaming in the Simla Hills region on a survey. Towards evening, as he was approaching a village, he stopped at a strange sight. Two venerable old men, with long white beards, sat in the mud by the village pond making clay guns—or clay cannon to be more precise. They had made a number already, and mounted these in various positions around them, but were diligently making more and seemed set to go on till night overtook them. My father watched for some time but the old men took no notice; they were completely engrossed in their work. Finally my father went on to the village. Here, from information he pieced together bit by bit, he found out that the two old men had come there some forty years earlier; they had been soldiers in the then Indian army of the British, had mutinied, joined with others in fighting British troops but finally been routed; they had then taken to the hills from where, it was believed, they had made a few more sorties against the British. Finally, with ammunition exhausted and contacts disrupted, they had gone into hiding, emerging from the forest a few years later to settle by the village. The villagers had let them stay, for by now they were harmless, rapidly ageing men, even if they had continued to think of and plan campaigns against the British. If only they had had artillery support! And this *idée fixe* had led them to make clay cannons: and they had gone on doing that, till they had even forgotten what they needed the guns for—they had drifted into a mindless compulsive activity . . .

I consider this a telling example of the functioning of time in experience. The two soldiers, by the intensity of their preoccupation with fighting the British, had caused time-in-experience to stand still: their campaigning had entered the timeless dimension where the fighting would continue till they died . . . (Perhaps in another sense too the anecdote reveals time in operation. I was told of these soldiers shortly after my own release from prison where I had myself spent a few years for trying to fight the British—and not with clay guns either. I found the story profoundly moving—so moving that I placed it in the tragic rather than merely the pathetic dimension; and

it has stayed in that category to this day. So that for me the emotion at the first hearing has also become fixed in a timeless order, like the combative impulse for the two veterans of the story. I could add that my father had encountered the old men in a comparable mental state; he too had just set aside ideas of fighting the British for India's independence, and taken up archaeology as a serious avocation. Was that why he had not forgotten—because he too had put the encounter in the timeless dimension?)

What I have just narrated is an instance of arrested time—time standing still in experience. One could follow up with examples of condensation or extension. For this I will not fall back on anecdote but present two extracts from confessions, the truth of one of which I can personally vouch for. 'Ajneya', in the introduction to *Shekhar: Ek Jivani*, recollects how the whole story is a 'verbalization of a vision seen in one night'. It is conventionally believed that a man in the moment of death or confrontation with death reviews his whole life: that statement is probably not literally true, but there is no doubt that under such or comparable conditions a human being lives at intense pressure, reliving, condensed into a few moments, experiences spread over a span of years. One may also recall the *Confessions of An Opium Eater*, where De Quincey records how under the influence of drugs he 'sometimes ... seemed to have lived a hundred years in one night; nay, sometimes had feelings of a duration far beyond the limits of human experience.' Drugs, as also fantasies, provide many examples of the opposite—of the extension of the experience of a moment into a much longer period. There are also examples of the dynamic fusion of all the elements which normally would be arranged according to an objective order of time.

It might appear or be argued, that all these are special if not abnormal ways of experiencing time. We might, therefore, consider a more normal pattern or model—though perhaps it should be pointed out that a dream experience, or the kind of experiences one might have just before falling asleep, are by no means abnormal.

I have already referred to Bergson's statement about time being the immediate datum of experience. Such a perception, though immediate, is not necessarily momentary, so that we need not visualize the 'point-instant' of the Buddhists, 'the ultimate reality cut loose from all imagination' and therefore 'qualityless, timeless and indivisible'. We may start somewhat more modestly with a moment of the experience of the present which, in the words of William James, 'has a certain breadth of its own on which we sit perched and

from which we look in two directions into time.' These two directions are of course the future and the past.

Such a moment, 'which has a certain breadth of its own', permits us, while living in the present, to have the experience of duration also. But how do we experience duration? Duration necessarily involves the experience both of flow and of the self which experiences the flow. Awareness of this interaction also makes us realize that in all such experience there is a regulative function at work, a creative function of memory which not only records but is continually busy selecting, revising, rearranging, re-evaluating what is or has been recorded, and in the light of this re-evaluation also modifying the view of the future. Not everything is remembered, not even events frequently repeated, though remembering and storing away is the habit of memory; memory, on the other hand, will recollect single, unique and unrepeatable experiences, and sometimes present a body or organized cluster of these instantly. That is why I call it not only a regulative but also a creative function of memory. This creative memory is perhaps the same thing as the creative imagination; the function which helps us to recover time and the self.

Elsewhere,<sup>1</sup> I have used a traditional Indian symbol of time—the *damaru* (double-ended drum)—to present diagrammatically the functioning of time in human experience—time as a perpetual Now. It is a useful symbol and I should like to use it again to present visually some aspects of the time experience.

In essential outline the *damaru* is a double cone, the two cones being joined apex to apex. From this junction the striker reaches out, striking the base of either of the two cones as the *damaru* is moved. This point, the junction of apices, is where the drum is held.

The junction in the time symbol is the present, the moment of the present, since that is all that the present can be. The two cones are Past and Future. We are always at the point of the present: 'Is-ness' is by definition that situation. We become aware of past or future as the drum is sounded at either end by the striker, symbolising our consciousness. The movement of the drum is our consciousness of time as flow, our awareness of duration. Consciousness of Time is in terms of movement toward or away from; in terms of Past or Future; or to use St Augustine's convenient labels, in terms of memory or expectation.

If the diagram were perfectly accurate and the two cones only

<sup>1</sup>See *Alavala*, National Publishing House, pp. 97—103, where the *damaru* is discussed along with the 'rotating gyre' Yeats refers to in *A Vision*.

touched apex-to-apex, we would probably have to go back to the old Buddhist problem: there could be no experience of duration; and even re-cognition or *pratyabhijna* could not be called upon to prove that anything from a previous moment had survived. But in fact the *damaru* has, at its waist, a short neck (the anatomical anomaly may please be forgiven!—human thought is always cast in an anthropomorphic mould, and the anatomical mix-up may provide a more comprehensible visual image of what I am trying to say). This waist or neck coincides with the ‘breadth’ to which William James referred in the passage I have already quoted: ‘The present has a certain breadth of its own on which we sit perched and from which we look in two directions into time.’ We might, therefore, correct the diagram to that extent, making a closer approximation to the actual shape of the drum, and also allowing for the fact of the experience of duration. Thinking strictly speculatively, one might argue that if we really could be at the perfect junction of the apices—at the point of the absolute present between past and future, there would not only be no duration but no expectation or memory: it would be truly an absolute present. Whether it would then be the ‘qualityless’ moment of the Buddhists, proving absolute evanescence, or the ‘*svalakshana*’ ‘time-in-itself’ of the realist, presenting the possibility of living release, *jivanmukti*, would be a matter that could then be argued interminably between speculative thinkers of various schools. Since both sides can also present the evidence of human experience of total evanescence as well as immortality-in-the-present, the debate remains open. For my part I am on the side which argues for the conquest of time through immortality in the present—however short or rare such moments of beatitude may be.

Speculation aside, the *damaru* still presents a relevant diagram of the structure of time in our consciousness: our situation between time past and time future. It was perhaps this situation that T.S.-Eliot was referring to when he talked of ‘a little consciousness’:

Time past and time future  
Allows but a little consciousness.  
To be conscious is not to be in time.

Perhaps, as I said, if the perfect moment could be achieved, the moment which did not have the ‘breadth’ that William James referred to, then we could be fully conscious and not at all in time. That not being the case, because

What might have been is an abstraction  
 Remaining a perpetual possibility  
 Only in a world of speculation . . .

Eliot goes on to assert the pervasive power of time—i.e., of historic, unidirectional time, which must always ‘point to one end, which is always there’:

Only in time can the moment in the rose-garden,  
 The moment in the arbour where the rain beat,  
 The moment in the smoky church at smokefall  
 Be remembered, involved with past and future.  
 Only through time is time conquered.



In a sense Eliot begs the argument when he talks of the ‘moment’ ‘remembered’, for memory is by definition time-bound. If conquest of time is possible, not merely in the speculative sense but of an actually achieved conquest, it is not through memory: it is only possible through the self-identity in the absolute present. It may be that ‘the moment in the rose-garden’ was one such moment; if so, the conquest of time achieved in that moment was of that moment. That moment may even be achieved again, and memory would have some part to play in that again, but in this case we are already thinking of memory in the timeless dimension: a creative rather than a recalling function. Indeed it is this creative aspect of memory which is perpetually organizing, synthesizing and regulating experience, and which discloses a unified and coherent structure of the self which otherwise would not be a fact of experience—would not be discovered by experience. Eliot recognizes this when he says:

Only by the form, the pattern,  
 Can words or music reach  
 The stillness, as a Chinese jar still  
 Moves perpetually in its stillness.

The reader may have recorded the important fact that, in using the *damaru* as a diagrammatic representation of the structure of time I had referred to the middle point, the ever-present Now, as the point from which the consciousness operates. But that is also the point from which memory operates, carrying out its synthesizing and regulating function, assembling those unique patterns of memory-structures into one unique whole which forms the self or the character of the experiencing individual. In other words, I know who I am

through the records and relations constituting the memory which is mine, and which differs from the memory-structure of others. What is externally the 'same' event is experienced by two different individuals in two different ways because the two memories involved place that event in uniquely different contexts, organize them into different memory-structures, assign to them different value and significance, and place them in different categories for recall.

Thus the attempt to reconstruct the self becomes the pursuit and recapture of time in experience: a fact neatly summed up in Proust's long effort at *Remembrance of Things Past—A la Recherche du Temps Perdu*. In Proust's case this was specially interesting because Proust accepted the view of time as composed of distinct and unrelated moments, and started with the premise that individual momentary impressions are separate and discontinuous. To begin with the assumption that the self must be illusory, as seemed the case on empirical and logical grounds, and to end up in discovery or rediscovery of self-identity is a fascinating movement. 'One is no longer a person', Proust asks, 'How then, seeking one's mind, one's personality as one seeks for a thing that is lost, does one recover one's own self rather than any other?' And he shows how; by the employment of memory in the sense of creative imagination: an aspect of memory to which I have already referred.

Memory has a non-uniform, dynamic order, commensurate with our experience of time as a non-uniform, dynamic flow. To Proust, time was composed of discrete and discontinuous moments. Others have used the metaphor of the river for time as continuous flow—others from Heraclitus down to Hermann Hesse. Ivan Bunin's image of the Well presents another dimension—of the flow of time arrested and made static, all events made co-present for the selective memory to delve into. The *Well of Days* is fictionalized reminiscence with a special flavour because of this feeling of arrested movement. Hesse has also found the river metaphor useful as a way round the time order of history, i.e., the irreversible direction: in a river one can travel upstream as well as down. The River of Memory is different from the River of History: in the former all events are preserved in timeless co-presence. It is thus that in his *Journey to the East* Hesse's characters move back and forth in time: from a nebulous present to the time of the crusades and farther back, and again into modern times, and so on. In the novel, *as in observed human memory, it is not only the past which leaves its traces, but also the future*. 'How can the future leave traces?' one may object.

Because, to go back for a moment to St Augustine's definition, our experience of time is made up of memory and expectation. Since at all times—at all moments of the ever-present Now, we are both remembering and expecting, our experience of the present is quite as much governed by what we expect as by what we remember: our future orders our present quite as much as our past. We may at this point also recall how the Saiva philosophers defined time: Time was what determined which one, out of the numberless possibilities which existed, will really occur. This might be regarded as time in its creative aspect, the matrix of all events. The event occurs at the conjunction of finite time with Infinity. By way of illustration, we may observe how in the Ramayana and Mahabharata there are frequent statements that the time for a particular event has come (*Kaloyam samagatah*)—in other words, that the conjunction of the two orders of time is imminent. The epic event was always set in a cycle of recurrence and was a relentless reminder of the existence of several time orders. And, one might add, of several orders of memory—including, could one say, a memory of the future?

For those interested in a strictly logical argument, it may be correct to say that expectation or aspiration becomes efficient as a cause only when it has become an element of the past; but such an insistence on logic would be beside the point when we are considering the dynamic structure of the experiencing self. Causality would still continue to apply; but causality in this context is to be differently defined. Causal connections here are no longer in an objective, uniform or consecutive order: they operate in 'dynamic interpenetration', to use Bergson's apt phrase. The important thing is no longer just the causal connection but the significant association. Significance is a value-charged aspect of experience; and this charge may come as frequently from the 'future' as from the 'past'. Indeed the 'dynamic interpenetration' of past and future, both in memory and in expectation, may be so complex that it might become impossible or futile to try and separate them: it might be easier and more fruitful from the very beginning to consider significant associations without considering temporal sequence at all. This is what a great deal of literature does and has been doing, not only surrealist literature but almost all modern literature in greater or less degree. The image and the symbol in poetry and fiction are examples; instead of cognitive, i.e., value-neutral meanings, we have value-charged meanings or significances. There is also the contemporary revolt against the value-charged world in the search for a new narrative realism—but of this

more later. The dream-poem and the fantasy are again examples of the use of value-charged imagery. The interesting thing to be noted just now is that both the use of the value-charged image and the revolt against it are results of the effort to present reality more accurately.

I have referred to Proust because Proust provides the first detailed documentation of the 'search for lost time' as a means to the search for the self. I should like to refer to another novel—an Indian one this time—of the late thirties, for what was in some ways an analogous search—the first in Indian literature. I refer to *Shekhar: Ek Jivani* by Ajneya.<sup>2</sup> I might claim to know the author rather intimately; or (should that claim be doubted on epistemological grounds!) I know this author's work as intimately as it can be known. Ajneya was unacquainted with the work of Proust when *Shekhar* was written. In any case the analogy is interesting for the differences, both in the object of the quest and in the design of time-movements evolved for the pursuit. Proust goes in search of the past with all the time at his disposal, so that already there is a dimension of the timeless in his search; furthermore he goes in search of his self with an uncommitted mind. Shekhar's search, on the other hand, is a *race against time*; he searches in the shadow of impending death—not just the death that comes at the end of time's movement in that direction, but an arbitrary arrest of time: death by hanging. And it is a committed search; he searches not for whatever self he might find or whatever significance he might discover; he is under compulsion to find meaning, i.e. significance, for a life with an arbitrarily limited time-span. And he is sure that such a significance there must be; even if the life is arbitrarily terminated, it must, at that point, have established a meaningfulness. In other words, that life must be meaningful from moment to moment: the accidental or fortuitous end must still acquire significance from its very finality. It has, therefore, the bias of Brother Juniper in Thornton Wilder's *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*, who looks for an 'intention' behind what on the face of it is an 'accident'. And the novel searches, with faith, in the kind of 'extreme situation' which later so attracted the existentialists during the last world war, leading them along such totally divergent paths.

My intention here is not to praise Ajneya either directly or by implication. Indeed I now feel so distant from this particular work of

<sup>2</sup>Ajneya is the name under which Sachidananda Vatsyayan has published all his imaginative work.

his that I might almost say, with the Roman, 'I come to bury Caesar, not to praise him.' The point I want to make is that though *Shekhar* was analogous to *Remembrance of Things Past* in some ways, and the first (and perhaps still the only) novel of its kind in Indian literature, the pattern of search and the predicament in which it was made were significantly different. The differences may be related to any or all of several factors—the cultural *milieu*, the temporal background (including the theoretical view of time, cyclic, historic, fluent, discrete, etc.), the philosophic assumptions regarding the self, the ontic or teleologic premises, the historical development of narrative techniques, including the structure of time within the novel... *Shekhar* is probably not a 'good' novel; but in its awareness of the complex structure of time and the handling of that structure within the narrative frame of the novel it was as conspicuously 'different' from anything before it as Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* was in its own time. And I believe that as an artistic structure it is much more closely knit and has a wholeness of form that *Tristram Shandy* lacks. The fact that there exists also the analogy with the existentialist 'extreme situation' without the existentialist's denial of meaning to life, indeed with an assertion of the value of life in the face of the situation, is also worth recording. Of course Ajneya's faith stands or falls by what it is: in itself it does not amount to a proof of the artistic merit or integrity of the novel.

The relationship between the concept of time and the identity of the self is also subject to negative verification. A loss of memory—the failure of the imagination to reconstruct the past—results in damage to the self, and traumatic damage of the self inevitably creates gaps in the memory. This has been of as much interest to the novelist as to various schools of psychology.

Eternity in the present context means timelessness, not infinite time. The reconstruction of the self through memory also has an aspect of timelessness: the process discovers and utilizes the co-presence of events of historically different periods and even their inseparableness due to dynamic interpenetration—the timelessness of a permanent Now.

It goes without saying that a work of art also displays this quality of timelessness, not only in the sense in which Eliot referred to the timelessness of the Chinese jar, 'moving perpetually in its stillness', or Keats to the timelessness of the Grecian Urn, but also in that art, as a 'way of life', can place us beyond the temporal perspective of death.

This need not be described pejoratively as 'aestheticism', nor denounced as an 'escapist' outlook; for what I am suggesting is only a detachment from the tyranny of time: an orientation towards those qualities of experience which seem to reverse or halt the consciousness of time's progress towards death.

I am simply a sack puffed out with air,  
 Tied at the mouth with ageing,  
 And promised to death:  
 And yet there's this other thing, this love,  
 That can set me free right in the middle of life.  
 This child of an instant can toss aside,  
 As if in play, Time's stunning hammer.

I have deliberately avoided detailed reference to cyclic concepts and theories of time as beyond the scope of the present exploration. But cyclicity must be mentioned in the context of the qualities of the experience of time which liberates it from consciousness of progress toward death. In the West the idea of cyclicity has recurred, itself cyclically, from the time of Heraclitus to that of Spengler<sup>3</sup> and Toynbee; in India it has been one of the basic themes of Indian culture. All heliocentric cultures have the cyclic concept of time—perhaps that is only a tautology—but the consequences are interesting. The cyclic tale is a uniquely Indian form; that the cyclic structure of the *Thousand and One Nights* is instrumental in securing

<sup>3</sup>I am tempted to quote a passage from Spengler here, both for the elevated prose of the statement as well as for the very relevant context:

'I see, in place of that empty figment of *one* linear history which can only be kept up by shutting one's eyes to the overwhelming multitude of the facts, the drama of *a number* of mighty Cultures, each springing with primitive strength from the soil of a mother-region, to which it remains firmly bound throughout its whole life-cycle; each stamping its material, its mankind, in *its own* image; each having *its own* idea, *its own* passions, *its own* life, will and feeling, *its own* death ... not *one* sculpture, *one* painting, *one* mathematics, *one* physics, but many, each in its deepest essence different from the others, each limited in duration and self-contained ... I see world-history as a picture of endless formations and transformations, of the marvellous waxing and waning of organic forms. The professional historian, on the contrary, sees it as a sort of tapeworm industriously adding on to itself one epoch after another ...' Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West*.

<sup>4</sup>I may here refer to one heliocentric culture which has survived into the present day, and which has been studied in detail by anthropologists, the Hopi Indians of America. It has been found that they do not have separate words for space and time, that they 'conceive of time and motion in the objective realm in a purely operational sense—a matter of the complexity and magnitude of operations concerning events—'

Scheherzade's reprieve from death is not without significance. The use of musical structures for the novel, with recurrent motifs, is an interesting modern variation of the cyclic idea; a linear treatment may be interwoven with a recurrent one to present time both historically and experientially. Thomas Mann's symphonic approach in *The Magic Mountain* may be contrasted with André Gide's use of the fugue as the basic form for his *Les Faux-Monnayeurs*.

I may add that music also recognizes in theory, and provides in practice, the simultaneity which is a reality of our time experience but which has lost its standing in theoretical physics. Music most nearly replicates our experience of time with fast and slow tempi, improvisation, cross-beat patterns, etc.

Consideration of this notion of 'return', 'recurrence' or 'cyclicity' in the treatment of human time naturally brings us to a consideration of myth and the use of myths in contemporary literature. Indeed a new interest in the myth is a widespread phenomenon. Myths are timeless prototypes of human existence, presenting as they do highly charged symbols suggesting cyclic repetition of identical or similar situations. Thomas Mann has called the myth a 'timeless schema'; the same idea of a timeless archetypal significance is contained in the Australian aborigine's notion of an event in 'dream-time'. 'Dream-time' also provides a timeless order of events of universal human significance. It is for this reason that, as we become increasingly subject to the oppressive tyranny of time, and threatened with complete reduction to expendable commodities, the interest in and significance of myth increases. Important modern writers have used mythological material—re-interpreted the myth in contemporary terms; and we might even say with justice that their significance is mainly due to the fact that they have been able to re-invest the myth with 'meaning': that is, charge it with a fresh value content. Kafka, Gide, Mann, Brecht, Camus, Sartre, Cocteau, O'Neill, Wilder, Dürrenmatt, Lagerquist—all represent the contemporary effort to re-live ourselves in the mythical landscape.

so that the element of time is not separated from whatever element of space enters into the operations.

That is to say, the Hopi Indians live in a true space-time continuum governed by operations performed at any point of time. And it is to be noted that the Hopis still have calendrical rites to restore the Sun to its right place and power, at a time corresponding to the winter solstice, though they have no separate name for such a point of time.' *Book of the Hopi*, Frank Waters, Ballantine Books, 1969.

Why?<sup>5</sup> Because man *needs* the timeless order of experience if he is not to let his personality and self disintegrate completely under the impact of what I might call 'commodity time'—time which is money, time which we hire, mortgage, buy and sell; time which, when used up, is fit only for the garbage heap... That is not an over-dramatization of the situation as it pertains today. Time is bought and sold, hired and held to ransom; time does become useless when worn out, like an old newspaper. *Productive* time is precious, time consumed worthless.

Time as experienced by man in modern technological society increasingly exhausts itself in quantitative units measurable here and now. Therefore there is an inner distance from the past which obliterates its form and divests it of meaning. The past is not only behind us, it has slid into limbo; it is also *psychologically* dead. Not only in history but also in the personal history of the individual the past has died because links with it have worn down and broken.

When we consider this psychological situation with the parallel fact that we never knew so much about the past as we do today, we are confronted with a paradox. We know more about the past, but the more we know about it the less it means to us: there is no feeling of continuity or identity. Indeed, we may even work up some kind of academic enthusiasm for our relationship with *Pithecanthropus* or the australoid ape, but from our own civilized human past the estrangement seems complete and irrevocable.

What does this mean in terms of the structure of the time we live in—the structure of experienced time? 'We have pushed back the limits of the past, but fore-shortened time in our age', says one perspicacious critic of the time-landscape of today. Thus while we continue to live in a perpetual present, the co-existence of all time is less and less possible. In other words the time we experience is becoming continually thinner, brittler, more and more attenuated and unidimensional. The range of our experience has expanded vastly, but the content of that experience has steadily contracted. No deep experiences; only more and more crowding of the shrivelled surface of experience.<sup>6</sup> It has been said that 'Technology has shortened time and expanded space.' More and more we live only in

<sup>5</sup>The trend is increasingly observable in several Indian writers as well: it is perhaps possible to relate it to the increasing pressure of historicity and the decay of larger dimension of the time-experience.

<sup>6</sup>How frequently in the United States today does one hear the phrase, 'Oh I hate to

the confined mental and emotional space provided by the newspaper, the popular pictorial, the cinema, the tabloid magazine, the cartoon strip... And of course the radio broadcast and the telecast story or play. The newspaper neither provides nor needs any principle of organization or structural relationship in events in any long-range sense; but this approach to the use and meaning of time feeds back to the radio, television, even the story and the novel. 'Reportage', the 'presentation of actuality'—not too long ago one used to hear of the presentation of reality, and that too in depth; but as our time-experience becomes thinner and more confined to the surface, actuality replaces reality. More and more we live less and less.

I might revert briefly to the place of myth in life and literature today. I have already said that myth is being re-interpreted in order to reinvest the condition of the human individual with significance by letting him re-live his life in the mythical landscape, re-enact the archetypal situation. But myths are not only the means to an eternal return to such pre-figurations of the individual's condition. Myths can also be symbols for a *generic* human identity. The human condition is not merely the condition of the human individual; it is the condition of mankind in general. To allude to an Indian myth of profound contemporary significance, it is not *nara* (man) alone who suffers or performs penance; it is *Narayana* (cosmic man) also. The destinies of the two are bound inseparably together, each giving meaning and dignity to the other. The myth, in this sense, provides temporal continuity and structural unity for the 'self' of man as a whole.

The search for identity and selfhood was earlier equated with the 'search for lost time'; the means available for this was shown to be the creative memory. Similarly the search for a generic identity and selfhood is also to be equated with the search for lost time, but in this context a collective universal time, the time of *Narayana* or *Purusha*. And the means available for this is again the creative memory, but now the creative collective or universal memory, the unconscious memory which is the storehouse of archetypal events, the repository of myths, subject to instant creative recall. It is perhaps because of this special function of myths that they have a quality of grandeur, a

get involved! though one would have thought that involvement in interpersonal relations would lead to an enrichment of experience and personality. Even the literary critic, and this has happened in India too, will *resent* the presentation of a rich emotional life because this richness is not characteristic of the life of the emotionally impoverished individual today.

civilizing and humanizing power, despite the presence of elements of cruelty: it is for this reason that the rediscovery and reinterpretation of mythical themes carries today a humanistic message. Human reality is being re-created by recharging actuality with significance.



## Time in Literature: The Time Orders of Realism

Time is the medium of narrative as of life. We live in time; we write about life in time. Before proceeding to consider the implications of this in terms of the problems raised for realistic presentation—problems compounded by changing concepts of reality itself, the most important of these being the reality of time and our experience of time—let us review a few traditional forms and stances of narration and put them each in its temporal perspective.

All readers will be familiar with the fairy tale: the story that opens with 'Once upon a time there lived...' But growing up brings its penalties: as we reach an age when fairy tales no longer appeal to us or convince us, we find that we are called upon to tell them to others for whom they are a part of their real world! But fairy tales need not be regarded as narratives of real happenings: they also carry a great deal of information which each civilization encodes in its own way, and to which keys are provided for all those invited within the charmed circle. Consider, for example, the opening phrase or formula in a fairy tale. Is it not a clear signal that what follows is a fairy tale, that it is not set in the ordinary time of our day-to-day experience but in a special order of time, an unhistoric, indeterminate but nevertheless *real* time with its own laws of probability and plausibility? Any listener, with this opening message, is given the choice either to enter that special convention of time and reality, or to reject it and stay on more familiar, truly 'pedestrian' ground. It is quite probable that, despite our claims and feelings of adulthood, most of us would, upon recognizing such a clear signal, be ready, at least for a while and tentatively, to listen further. If the story is interesting or amusing, we would be willing to listen through: even though we *at no time* suspend disbelief and accept it as true to our ordinary external realities. Men of all ages are always ready for a tentative 'suspension of disbelief' if the consequences are pleasurable.

There are equivalent opening stances in all languages, also some

interesting (and instructive) variations. *Ek raja tha* is strictly equivalent to ‘Once there was a king’; but consider the Panjabi folk-tale variation: *Ikk si te raja si*, which might be rendered ‘One was—was a king’! This is still a conventional stance; but what is the content of this signal? That the tale to follow is not only not set in the ordinary *time* of our experience, but also not in the ordinary *space* of our routine experience: nor indeed about the ordinary creatures of our world of ordinary intercourse. ‘One was’—no clue as to who was, when was, or where was—just *one was*. In both the temporal and spatial dimension, there is an invitation to shed the trammels of ordinary experience; the suspension of disbelief sought is twofold—in fact threefold, if we consider also the invitation to shed our prejudices regarding the kind of characters we are going to meet. If we can shed any biases, we might as well be prepared to shed all of them. If we can’t, or won’t, well, we should go and look elsewhere for our storyteller.

The opening of the Sanskrit story is another interesting variation. *Asti Godavari-tire visalah salmali taruh*; there is on the bank of the Godavari a great Salmali tree. Not ‘was’ but ‘is’; and Sanskrit syntax permits the sentence to begin with the verb in the present tense. Instead of the ‘One was’ of the Panjabi opening, we have just ‘Is’: what clearer signal could there be that the narrative to follow is set in the timeless dimension of the ever present? The great Salmali tree is always there: it just *is* and that’s all there is to it. You needn’t believe it; if you don’t the loss is yours. One might hazard the generalization that most eastern cultures will have the equivalent of this ‘Is’ or timeless opening. (Or rather one should say southern cultures, for the real differences are between northern and southern cultures rather than between eastern and western; it is the latitudinal status that affects our life patterns, not the longitudinal which is subject to diurnal rotation.)

I had said earlier that the ‘chain tale’ was a uniquely Indian form; I related the reprieve of Scheherzade in the *Thousand & One Nights* to the cyclic structure of the story too. I should like to refer to another kind of chain story—a linear rather than a cyclic chain. Some readers may be familiar with this kind of story. A prototype is the tale of the cock bird and the hen bird—Gaur and Gauraiya or *chira* and *chiri*. The hen bird wants something, say a kernel of grain and the cock bird goes in search of it. He asks the farmer, who will give it provided the revenue man spares him, the revenue man will spare him if the policeman will promise not to report, the policeman will desist if the

officer will be kind, the officer will be kind if the king is generous, the king will be generous if the queen goes into a pet, the queen will do that if the snake threatens to bite her, the snake will bite if the stick threatens him, and so on. Finally the god or goddess obliges; then the rain gets ready to fall so the fire will burn so the stick will strike so the snake will bite so the queen will scowl so the king will be merciful ... so at the end of the chain the hen bird will get the grain of wheat and all will be well ... This chain tale also has a special significance which must not be missed. There is a double causality at work here. First there is the causality of natural function or *dharma*—of the rain to quench fire or the fire to burn, the snake to bite, etc. Then there is a second chain of causality, a *fortuitous* one, since it is *not* the natural function of the queen to go into a pet or even for the policeman to tell on the revenue man. This fortuitous relationship is to be treated as 'causality' because it relates certain actions to certain consequences. In the ethos of the earliest forms of this motif the relationship might even have seemed truly causal in that there were no observed exceptions: the apparently fortuitous stick was really the efficient cause. Even *grace* might have been causal, being efficient; the gods were also bound by *dharma*. Anyway, the point is that there was a chain of interdependence of events; and that there were two movements in the story—a forward one in which the interdependence was postulated, and a reverse one in which it took effect and was resolved. Thus though there was not a cycle, there was a forward and a reverse movement of time: we could say that the circle had been converted to a two-track line.

None of these conventions would be used or considered acceptable for realistic narration today: they would not be 'true to' our time-experience. But the point is that they were meant to be true to a certain time-experience; they *were* legitimate tools and techniques for the realistic presentation of time at a certain time or in a certain milieu. One might object that they sought to present moral truths, not reality: but the moral truths were the root and substance of reality—to the audience as well as the storyteller of that time. What happened in the story was true, that is why it was endlessly being used to illustrate and demonstrate what was true: the story was an audial model of the structure of truth and reality. It is useful to emphasise this point to relate the developments in technique to the time-experience germane to each new development.

Basically, the first major change in narrative technique, in answer

to the inner logic of the form itself is with Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*. Sterne is the first novelist to show this awareness of narrative or structural time and relate it to the question of the presentation of reality—the reality of time-experience itself as well as of events, i.e., 'happenings in time'. He is also the first to weave the consideration of structural and fictive time into the story itself. Even before this we were familiar with the Dear Reader kind of intrusion by the omniscient novelist:

Good people all of every sort,  
Give ear unto my song,  
And if you find it wondrous short  
It cannot hold you long,

but Sterne's intrusion was qualitatively different: he was inviting the reader into the works; not just telling them how to look at or interpret the actions of characters on the stage but to come backstage and look at the makeup and the properties.

By this contrivance, the machinery of my work is of a species by itself: two contrary notions are introduced into it, and reconciled, which were thought to be at variance with each other. In a word, my work is digressive, and it is progressive too—at the same time.

Or again

This is vile work—for which reason, from the beginning of this, you see, I have constructed the main work, and the adventitious parts of it, with such intersections, and have so complicated and involved the digressive movements, one wheel within another, that the whole machine, in general, has been kept a-going and, what's more, it shall be kept a-going these forty years, if it pleases the fountain of health to bless me so long with life and good spirits ...

The tone is flippant; but this flippancy disguises a keen insight into narrative structure and a serious concern with the problem of realistic narration, in particular of presentation of the time-experience. What is the realistic equivalent of the real experience? Sterne's presentation of the dilemma, through Tristram, is both amusing and challenging:

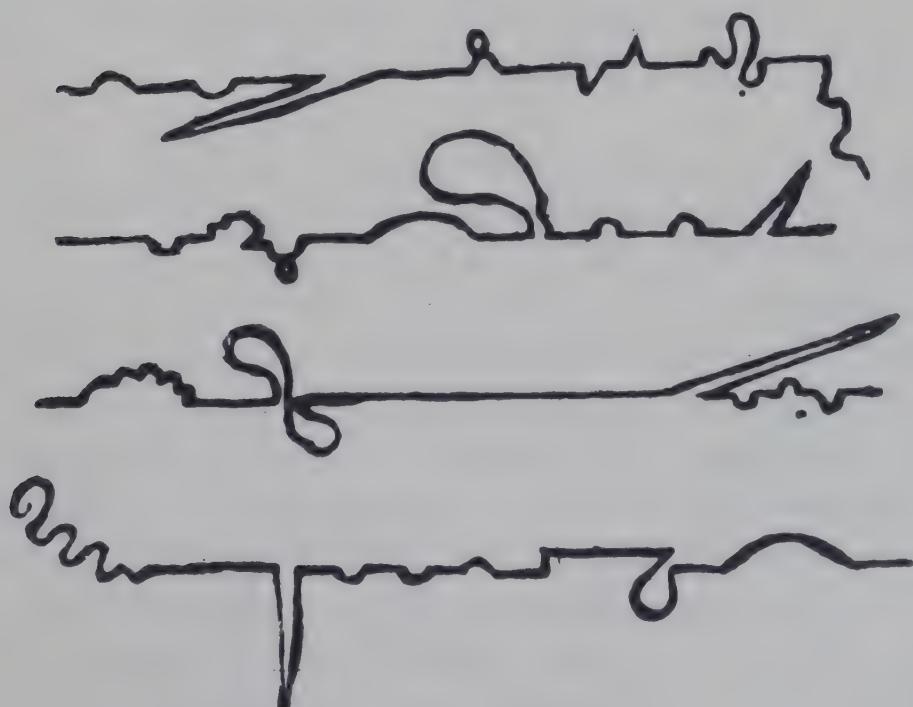
I am this month one whole year older than I was this time twelve

month; and having got, as you perceive, almost into the middle of my fourth volume—and no further than to my first day's life—'tis demonstrative that I have three hundred and sixty-four days more life to write just now, than when I first set out; so that instead of advancing, as a common writer, in my work with what I have been doing at it—on the contrary, I am just thrown so many volumes back—was every day of my life to be as busy days as this—And why not?—and the transactions and opinions of it to take up so much description—and for what reason should they be cut short? as at this rate I should live 364 times faster than I should write. It must follow, an' it please your worships, that the more I write the more I shall have to write—and consequently, the more your worships will have to read.

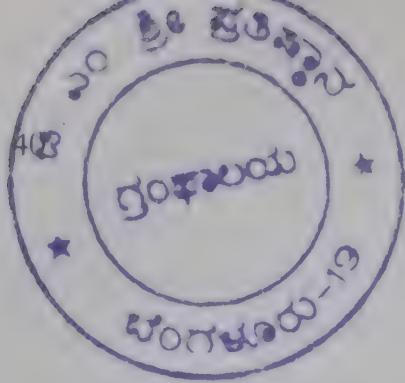
Will this be good for your worships' eyes?

One more quotation, even more flippant in tone and commensurably serious in import:

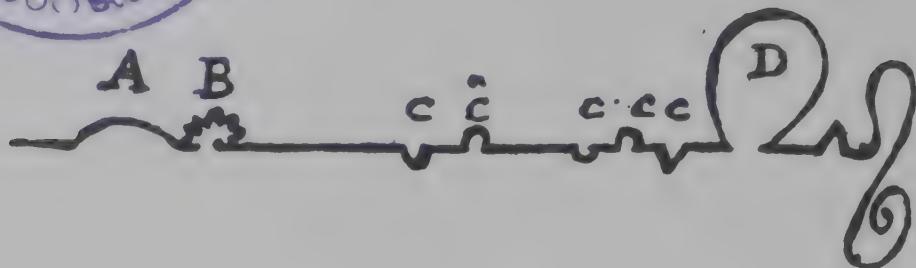
I am now beginning to get fairly into my work; and by the help of a vegetable diet, with a few of the cold seeds I make no doubt but I shall be able to go on with my uncle Toby's story and my own in a tolerable straight line. Now



These were the four line I moved through in my first, second, third and fourth volumes. In the fifth volume I have been very good—the precise line I have described in it being thus:



## A SENSE OF TIME



By which it appears that, except at the curve marked A, when I took a trip to Navarre—and the indented curve B, which is a short airing when I was there with the Lady Baussiere and her page—I have not taken the least frisk of a digression, till John de la Cassé's devils led me the round marked D—for as for cccc they are nothing but parentheses and the common ins and outs incident to the lives of the greatest minister of state and when compared with what men have done—or with my own transgressions at the letters A B D—they vanish into nothing.

In this last volume I have done better still—for from the end of Le Fever's episode, to the beginning of my uncle Toby's campaigns—I have scarce stepped a yard out of my way.

If I mend at this rate, it is not impossible—by the good leave of his grace of Benevento's devils—but I may arrive hereafter at the Excellency of going on ever thus: . . .

Tristram never arrives at that sort of 'excellency' since he never intended to; the whole exercise is to present the diagrams of his 'digressions and progressions', a picture of time as it really moves in our experience, in part governed by our efforts in pursuit of our aspirations, for the rest unpredictably and even capriciously!

One might, at this stage, take a cue from Tristram and follow his method, developing an argument through 'progression by digression'. It may have occurred to the reader while going through these quotations from *Tristram Shandy* that what Sterne was doing was making a distinction between 'fact' and 'truth', between 'fact' and 'reality'. A novel is not concerned with the presentation of 'fact': no art form is. But in what sense is it concerned with 'truth' either, when by its very definition it is 'fiction'? Truth in the novel is 'significant' fact; the facts in the novel are presented in significant association, and furthermore, in such association within a certain frame. Our response to the associative significance makes the 'facts'

of the novel 'true', since we recognize them as *true* to the situations or characters presented; our recognition of the frame in which the facts are thus significantly presented invests them with reality: they become real in our experience, i.e., they become events of *our* inner world.

An event could be defined as 'action in time'. Of course all action is in time and cannot be except in time; but this definition, within our frame of reference, makes clear that an event, as action-in-time, is presented to our experience in this dynamic double aspect: motion as well as duration of motion.

A shift in inner feeling is also action: awareness of the shift sets it in time and gives it duration, making it an event.

To present events in the inner world, the novelist must therefore employ what a critic has called 'symbols of disorder' because the structure of that world shows significant association—it need not be re-emphasised that significance means 'value-charged meaning'—but perhaps it should be added that association means or results in *the dynamic fusion of the time elements involved*. This fusion of the time elements is so conspicuously a part of modern fiction that one observer has made the assertion that 'The interior monologue is the real novel of our time.' The dynamic fusion of time in the experience of duration is most vivid in dream and fantasy; dream and fantasy play an important role in modern fiction for that reason. I have already referred to Proust and to Hesse; I might add the names of Joyce, Virginia Woolf, Faulkner, Dos Passos and indeed a host of others.

Now it is of course true that these novelists were acquainted with contemporary psychological thought and even influenced by the discoveries of propositions of psycho-analysis. The techniques that developed in fiction, and the jargon that developed in criticism, both owed a debt to the psycho-analytical thinking of the time. 'Stream of consciousness', 'free association', 'interior monologue', the 'logic of images'—every one of these phrases and techniques reflect the impact of that thinking. But, if our awareness of the structure of reality is modified by our scientific knowledge about the nature of matter and of time on the one hand, and our knowledge of the working of the human mind, of the structure of consciousness itself on the other, it is natural and right that our techniques for the presentation of reality should also be modified by such knowledge—the aim remains the presentation of reality. We know that Joyce was actually in touch with the society of psycho-analysts in Zürich when

he was writing *Ulysses*; we know also that Hesse was a personal friend of Jung's and a visitor, probably a frequent one, to the Eranos centre where frequent discussions were held on the wider implications of the new theoretical or conceptual models of the human psyche and consciousness. We know that Mann and Hesse often discussed the subject.

Proof of other writers' acquaintance with psycho-analysts would not, in any case, take away anything from the value of the novelists' contribution to our picture of experiential reality. Apart from the fact (already quoted) that Freud acknowledged his debt to writers, claiming credit only for working out a scientific system for the study of what was already known to the artist, one could bring even the ordinary contemporary individual into the picture and match Freud's statement with the assertion that the Unconscious, and our peculiar ways of experiencing reality, were already facts of common knowledge; what the novelists did was to evolve techniques for their significant presentation. It was not that the novelists alone first experienced contemporary reality; they made it and the experience of it communicable.

The problem of communication of the experience of reality—though 'of the reality of experience' would be as true and relevant—is what, in the writer's domain, constitutes the problem of narrative realism. The means which the novelists adopted for this—or rather the lines along which they searched for adequate means to make what was *really real realistically* real—might be put into three categories or frames. Enquiry into the nature and structure of communicable or artistic reality led, first, to an enquiry into the nature and structure of language—the semantic possibilities (and limitations) of communication; secondly, to enquire into the nature and structure of consciousness—the possibility of modified applications of psycho-analytic methods and techniques to communication; and thirdly, to a fresh exploration of the structure of the narrative form itself. As enquiries go, none of these are 'absolutely' new, for all three fields of enquiry have always been open since the consciousness of reality and its conscious presentation began. Historically too, it is a fact that Joyce owed a great deal to a little-known French writer named Dujardin, who discovered the interior monologue as a narrative technique without acquaintance with psycho-analytic theory.<sup>1</sup> Similarly the semantic adventures or games of Lewis Carroll may be

<sup>1</sup>I do not know the work of Dujardin at all, but make this assertion on an admission by Joyce himself to a critic.

quoted as precursors of the attempt to condense meanings into words by telescopic compression, inventing words from suggestive sound elements of several words in order to pack meaning into one, and thus seek closer approximation to the speed and modes of experience. Actually experience moves much too fast and words can never catch up with the pace at which the consciousness registers or can register an event; one may say that the attempt is a hopeless one. That itself becomes a justification for the attempt to reduce the discrepancy between the speed at which and the complexity with which the event moves and the speed at which the fastest narrator can record it.

Apart from this lag, the semantical approach has other limitations. Language as communication is based on social convention: words have universally agreed meanings. Of course a creative use of language is never limited to this primary meaning; at the same time it never totally sheds or rejects that meaning. The words used are 'ordinary'; it is the use to which they are put, and the manner in which they are juxtaposed, which makes them the vehicles of extraordinary meanings—'correspondences' in Baudelaire's sense or 'significance' in the sense in which I have used that word earlier. Since the words are ordinary, the road is always open for the ordinary reader if he wishes to make the effort to reach the extra meaning or significance. But new compressed coinage by the novelist, although his motive might be understood and even sympathetically considered, carries with it the danger of the words becoming arbitrary symbols; invented words having a private meaning which the reader cannot reach because between him and the author there is no longer a common convention. The reader may be presented with a lock to which he has no key; and it is conceivable that the author himself may have thrown the key away because once he has presented a reality it has ceased to interest him in the same urgent way! *Ulysses* has examples of this kind of private or personal language; and critics have laboriously tried to shape various keys to the riddles such a language presents. Joyce is not the only writer who has fared thus—set out to solve a problem, even if only partially, and created another which may not be even partially soluble.<sup>2</sup>

To a lesser extent, the second approach may also present similar problems. In trying to present reality by focussing one's attention on the structure of consciousness, one cannot rely completely upon a

<sup>2</sup>See the following chapter for a discussion of the time order of language.

general or universal model, since one starts from the premise that reality is unique to each experiencing consciousness, that one is to present the unique character which can only be done by presenting his uniquely structured self or consciousness. The 'stream of consciousness' technique limits itself to presenting the unique memory-structure, and the event, in the context or landscape of this unique 'dynamic interpenetration' of an individual, i.e., unique past-present-future configuration. The danger of memory images becoming private exists here too, but far greater variety is possible and therefore a far greater set of choices is available. In the case of language one begins with the premise, or bias if you will, of the common convention; in the delineation of the memory there is no such presumption or bias. The 'verification' of the unique character presented, the question whether or not the character is 'true to' a more general or universal aspect of experience, arises only later. The 'river' image, counterpart of the 'stream of consciousness' technique, is more easily made intelligible or acceptable to the reader than some of the semantic antics of Lewis Carroll in *Through the Looking Glass*. To put it differently, metaphor still provides greater possibilities of a universal language than the coined word.

'The river,' to quote from Hesse's *Siddhartha*, 'is everywhere at the same time, at the source and at the mouth, at the waterfall, at the ferry, at the current, in the ocean and in the mountain, everywhere, and the present only exists for it, not the shadow of the past, nor the shadow of the future.' This is an easily acceptable statement not only of the fact that our time-experience is rooted in a perpetual Now, but also of the co-presence of all tenses in the Now of our experience. But when we combine 'glisten' and 'lissome' into 'glissome', we already begin to have difficulties; if we say 'brunch' for breakfast-lunch or 'tilk' for tea-with-milk or 'mloffee' for coffee-in-milk ('milch-kaffee'), we become either funny or unintelligible. And yet these are simple enough compressions, dealing as they do with substantives, and ordinary routine experiences. What about telescoped verbs? Which is what we would most need to compress action or images of action?

'Riverrun', says Joyce. 'Riverrun, past Eve and Adam's.' 'Beside the rivering waters of, the hithering and thithering waters of.' That far—not too difficult perhaps, though verging on the quaint. But suppose we are thinking of the man who is dithering through his experience of events: can we combine 'rivering' for flow, 'hithering and thithering' for directional flow with 'dithering' for aimless or

erratic movement? Can we say 'hithering and thithering waters of,' 'hithidithering waters of?' And if not, why not?<sup>3</sup>

To come to the third approach: the examination of the novel form itself in the search for possibilities of better and truer presentation of reality—reality as experienced, of course, since that is what the novel concerns itself with.

This is the point where one is tempted to make another of those 'digressions for progression' which Tristram Shandy indulged in so frequently (for the purpose of exploring the possibilities of the novel form itself!) But I shall vary the formula slightly and attempt progression by repetition.

The novel, even more so than other art forms<sup>4</sup> is a time-bound art because time is the essence of narration. 'As soon as fiction is completely delivered from time it cannot express anything at all', said E.M. Forster. But let us not confine ourselves to the narrator in the novel; the narrative is an event in more than one time order since the narratee, the reader or listener, also comes into it: so do the characters, needless to say. Let us consider the reading process too for a moment. We read a word or phrase at a time. The reading experience is also in the present, what we have read a moment before is already blurred in our consciousness, and what we shall read in the next moment is also only half-guessed at in anticipation. Even if we have read the work before, the earlier reading is part of a half-remembered experience from a state of being before. So that the past-present-future configuration is there too; the memory-and-expectation pattern that we have talked of before. That is not all. In real life experience we do not always have such a clear idea of the shape of our expectation, particularly in the frame of time; we may have an expectation about how an experience or event begun is going to end; but not when it is going to end. In the case of the novel, on the other hand, we do have some idea of the total time the experience of reading is going to take: quite often now magazines tell us how long the reading time is going to be. This pre-figuration or bias about the duration of the event—the narrative event, not the narrated event—is a part of the novelist's problem.

<sup>3</sup>Isn't it the inadequacy of language to communicate an experience in its entirety that obliges the Zen poet, describing a growing cucumber on a vine, to limit himself to the statement. The cucumber is cucumbering?

<sup>4</sup>The time-boundness of music or dance is qualitatively different both because of the absence or tenuity of the narrative element and because the perpetual return to the *Sama* or the basic stance has a liberating effect: cyclicity always introduces the timeless dimension.

I might add that this is the problem of the *printed* novel; for the story-teller in the oral tradition it was different in quantity as well as in degree. The book's bulk gives the novelist away; in a magazine story the reader generally turns over the pages to get a rough idea of the reading duration before he starts to read. This is an additional aspect of the time-boundness of the modern fiction writer.

Narrative time or structural time is the total time taken to relate events, however ordered. In other words, it is the time taken to read the presentation of events, however ordered. The problem of the rapidity or intensity of action is also relevant, but is not raised here for the sake of clarity of argument. The order could either be in the natural sequence of occurrence, or it could be some arbitrary variation. But what is the natural sequence of occurrence? There is the historical or chronological sequence which may apply to external events, but when we come to experience, can it still be called natural? In experience, in the consciousness of either writer or reader, is the natural order or sequence that of occurrence, or of the registering of that occurrence? In other words, does the event occur in the external, historical temporal perspective, or the internal psychological perspective? The preceding discussions should be enough to indicate the answer clearly; fiction as art is concerned with the psychological time-perspective, not the historical one.

But if it is clear that the inner event takes place in a different time order, than nothing is solved by ignoring the historical order: there are so many alternative choices suddenly open that the problem becomes only more agonising. 'Begin at the beginning' is the advice often given to characters in fiction by other characters in fiction; but nothing ever begins at the beginning, as is further borne out by the fact that even in fiction this advice is given somewhere in the middle of the story. Out of the infinite number of choices that suddenly open up, which one shall the novelist take? He could begin almost anywhere, and build the story backward and forward, the flash-backs again occurring at different points, in different order, giving different chunks of information differently grouped ... It is this freedom that allows for originality: the same event could be made into so many uniquely different stories, all the differing presentations stemming from the one effort to present the event in true perspective—the event 'as it really happened'.

I have not yet explicitly mentioned what I might call *fictive time*—time in the story—though consideration of this is implicit in considerations of the time order of events. Fictive time is the time in which

the characters live their lives. Just as in narrative time the sequence of events may be re-ordered in any of many ways, in fictive time they are compressed or extended or balanced in other ways, again in an attempt to approximate to reality—again psychological reality. In other words, narrative realism attempts to approximate the presentation of reality to, be true to, several orders of psychological reality.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup>Any discussion of time in fiction must necessarily take note of *Tristram Shandy* because Lawrence Sterne was not only the earliest novelist to make the reader aware of the dimensions of the problems involved but also because he wove his observations and speculations into the plot itself. But it is not to be imagined that more recent novelists have not surpassed him in ingenuity of construction or deftness in handling even more complex aspects of the current scientific concepts of time. It is not only science fiction—which has developed as a new genre—that has displayed such inventiveness and a sense of intellectual adventure in leading us to the very frontiers of our imaginative comprehension. One of the most exhilarating novelists I have read in recent years is Italo Calvino, who writes stories which cannot be classed as science fiction, but which invariably use current scientific concepts—more especially concepts of time—as the material from which he formulates the problem after which the plot seems to fashion itself: a plot so intriguing, so tantalising that we tend to become oblivious of the sheer ingenuity of the author's intellect. Calvino's *Ti con Zero (Time & the Hunter*, Jonathan Cape, 1970) is an extension of the fictional form that almost defies classification: are these marvellous and ingenious episodes, not integrally related but gathered in an arrangement for a particular effect, or are they really chapters of a novel which, through its scattered episodic character itself, confronts us with the temporal reality which has in truth become too complex for our intellectual and emotional grasp? Problems of simultaneity and consequentiality, instantaneity and duration, causality and caprice, cessation and transformation are all there; presented with a thoroughness that would do credit to a scientific dissertation but with the verve of an acrobat or a tight rope dancer and the ironic humour of the master showman who knows he has his audience in his grip. Much ingenuity in the presentation of time has been shown by other novelists too; some have broken the continuity of the story into episodes printed on separate sheets to be shuffled like a pack of cards to demonstrate the non-sequentiality and capriciousness of all events. But Calvino's blend of quiet irony and wild imagination provides an intellectual stimulus for anyone interested in the possibilities of contemporary fiction. Calvino's variation of the classical image of the moving arrow, still against the sky ( $T_0$ ), or his own novel one of the automobile chase within a traffic jam, are memorable examples; the name of the protagonist Qwfwq, the same whichever way it is read, illustrates his method of compressing a vast problem into a tiny nutshell. Isn't time the hunter, or  $t_0$  as the first term in the series  $t_1 t_2 \dots$  itself Qwfwq?



## Communication Time: The Time Order of Language

Sufficient attention has perhaps been paid to the sense of time, to its historical and experiential aspects and to the problems that arise in fictional representation of the time experience—one might even say ‘the fictional presentation of time *in time*’. But it should not be assumed that the literary problems connected with the communication of the time experience have been exhausted: indeed what has been said so far should give ample indication of other related problems which could be pursued independently, the reader finding his own illustrations and analysing the technical devices invented by the writer to solve his basic problem of how to present real experience realistically.

There is one aspect of the problems related to time in literature which inheres in the medium of literature itself: the time order of language. There is a dimension of the relationship between the time order and the order of language which affects not only our presentation of reality but the very perception of reality.

Let us undertake a little exercise in visualization: let us for a moment focus our attention on any scene—just the things lying before us or around us in our room—the ‘objective reality’ by which we are surrounded. Perhaps a few books, a chair, a table, a penstand, cigarette ash, a foot-rule, ink-stains, some crumpled paper . . . I have deliberately not listed these objects in any order: one could list them in any other sequence, either equally haphazard or properly planned. The important question at the moment is not the order in which they are listed. All these things, the objects which constitute ‘the scene’, can be seen—visually comprehended—simultaneously. We may call this visual perception and comprehension the direct experience—the direct visual experience. Now let us look at the same scene with the eyes of an artist—or to put it a little differently, let an artist visualize the same scene. So far as the ‘direct visual experience’ is concerned, there should be no difference between his view and ours (except for differences to which I shall refer later); but when the artist proceeds

from his view of reality to his pictorial representation, his vision will have undergone a change. He will even be seeing things differently; and he will be presenting a different visual experience. The casual order of these things will have undergone an arrangement. In the first place the artist would be presenting the same objects not in a shapeless and unbounded vacuum but in an imaginary frame; he would be presenting not a number of objects in a fortuitous, formless contiguity but in *an ordered composition*. The objects would be the same and yet in the picture they might not be in the same positions as in the direct visual experience; quite possibly while some might have become a little bigger, others might be reduced in size; some might look brighter and others more obscure than in the direct experience. Some might even have the shape distorted.

Suppose that having seen the things directly, we now also see the artist's representation of them. We are in a position to compare two direct visual experiences, both our own: for our seeing the picture in the first place is also a direct visual experience. Here again, despite the re-arrangement, deviation and distortion of various objects by the artist, we will again be offered a comprehensive and contemporaneous (if not simultaneous), view of all the objects in the picture. Also, the eye will be free to range back and forth or in different directions during the act of perception.

Of course, even in the primary direct vision the view might differ from person to person as from artist to artist (the 'subjective reality', the inevitable process of selection, emphasis or attention conditioned by a variety of factors). For the present we may ignore these idiosyncratic differences between experiences of the same *order*. Our aim is first to bring out the different natures of the two experiences and then to proceed with a further consideration of only the second kind of experience.

Now let us consider a verbal description of the objects in the picture or in the original scene. The mere enumeration of objects could of course be done randomly: the pictured objects listed in any one of various arbitrary orders. But once we come to describing these objects—moving from the primary visual experience (of scene or picture) which is ours, to a description through which we seek to communicate the scene or the picture to another, we become aware of an inevitable limitation. Language can present all those objects in any one of various possible sequences, but always necessarily in a sequence: it cannot present them all simultaneously. In other words, while there is free choice of the order of description, there is no

choice so far as an order is concerned—objects may only be presented consecutively and in an irreversible direction; the eye cannot range freely, back and forth, picking out words at random.

*Things coexist: they have a simultaneous existence. But language and narrative must necessarily maintain a consecutiveness.*

This inexorable bond of language order is another dimension of the presentation of reality. And this inevitable consecutiveness has, in its turn, more than one dimension. It is not merely that in offering objects to the attention we present them consecutively: I have already referred to the process of selection, interest and emphasis. Again, being made up of parts, language breaks the flow of experience. Apart from this, language has its own rigid order, which allows for very slight variations. There are sentences; words and clauses within the sentence have to appear in a certain order. Undoubtedly a certain latitude exists; some degree of deviation from this order is possible or permissible and the writer—especially the poet—utilizes these possibilities to the limit, achieving variety, colour, movement, tension and even some startling effects: also perhaps a memorability which may be his real purpose. But he can do this only within a circumscribed field. Any deviation beyond these, any transgression of these frontiers, makes language meaningless; description or narration becomes impossible. We can deviate from the normal language order of the sentence 'The bird flew away', and say 'Away flew the bird', etc. 'Away the bird flew' is still within the limits of grammar; we might get away with 'Flew away the bird' or perhaps even 'Flew the bird away'. And these deviations from the normal sequence might produce special effects, which might be planned or desired. But when we deviate from 'Ram picked up a biscuit from the table and ate it' to, say, 'The up from picked table biscuit ate Ram', we have destroyed all meaning.

We can look at the objects presented to our view in any order. We can look at the picture of those same objects again in any order according to our fancy recognizing, of course, that the artist's presentation would already have given them a certain sequence of prominence or emphasis—indeed he might have placed them in an arrangement or composition which itself might be comprehensible to us). But when we come to language—description or narration—we

'Language cannot convey non-verbal experience being successive and linear; it cannot express simultaneous experience being composed of separate and divisible units. It cannot reveal the unbroken flow of the process of living.' A.A. Mendilov. *Time and the Novel.*

cannot present or assimilate sentences in any arbitrary order: sentences cannot be read backwards, nor can all the words in a sentence be jumbled and rearranged in any random or capricious sequence. Language orders reality. Language is a medium for the presentation of reality; yet at the same time it recognizes and arranges reality. Reality is presented to us only in the order which the language has imposed upon itself. Thus in a sense it re-objectivizes reality after, in any artistic work, first giving us the facility to record and present it subjectively. This perpetual tension between subjective and objective is also an inescapable feature of any artistic presentation or communication of reality through language.

So far we have considered literary narrative and description only in contrast with painting. We have done so for the sake of simplicity. We could now proceed to another art form which is closer to fictional narrative while yet remaining visual: the cinema. It is possible in the cinema, as well as in fiction, to distort and even to reverse the order of events: both in the novel and in the cinema what is historically later can be offered first; it is also possible to present a chain of events starting in the middle and travelling in either direction. And yet mention of this similarity itself focuses our attention on a very important difference between the medium of language and that of the cinema. We can run a cinema film *in reverse*: this will not only reverse the time order but *also the direction* of each individual event. A running man would be seen running backwards; the flower vase fallen from the table and smashed into a thousand pieces will magically reassemble itself from the pieces, defying gravity to rise up from the floor and rest again on the table; the chicken would disappear back into the egg from which it had hatched and the shattered egg would become whole again. But in a novel, though we could reverse the sequence of events, presenting later events first, we cannot reverse the direction of time: each event would still have to proceed in the same irreversible historical direction. The running man might start from an earlier position, but he can only run forward. And not only that: the narrative would also have to be bound by the order of language.

This is another important aspect of the problem of 'realistic narration'—the effect of the sequentiality of language on the problem of literary presentation of time.

The comparison of the fictional and the cinematic medium is not merely to contrast their possibilities. The juxtaposition is designed to draw particular attention to their parallel development. We have already considered how new scientific concepts influenced our

sense of time and led to the evolution of new techniques in fiction. But the same scientific concepts and theories affected other artistic media also: scientific discoveries opened up new possibilities for the development of techniques in all the other arts. A study of all these developments and possibilities is relevant not only to the study of those arts but also to the growth of the medium of fiction because there was continuous interchange between all the art forms. Techniques developed in one medium became available to other media where they were tried and used with such modifications as seemed necessary. The cinema and the novel were inevitably close to each other, especially in the early days of the former; before its potentialities as an art form were realized. The natural interaction between them led to the influence being disseminated in both directions.

The cinema was one of the most important influences on the novel. Whereas new scientific concepts had inspired some lines of fresh experimentation in the novel, developments in the cinema stimulated a search for linguistic or literary analogues of the special technical possibilities of the cinema. What the novel owes to the cinema is often overlooked, particularly by critics in India: critics tend to attribute to the western novel influences which really stem from the cinema. Such technical devices, for example, as the 'stream of consciousness' or the 'flash-back', etc., when seen in the Indian novel, are immediately attributed to the western novel and the facile conclusion drawn that these techniques have been borrowed from there, whereas the origin probably lies in similar developments in a parallel (and native) medium. Of course, there could be direct borrowing from writer to writer; but in fact a good writer rarely borrows techniques directly from another in this way. What is more likely to happen, and would lead to more fruitful consequences, is that a writer views other writers' achievements *in the light of the total contemporary possibilities of the particular medium* and then naturally uses this richer and more developed medium. The process could also be described somewhat differently: we could say that the writer identifies a solution to his special problem in the general development of an advancing medium, and then adapts that solution to his own purposes. It is quite conceivable that in making this adaptation he transforms it totally. In fact it is only such imaginative adaptation that enriches his medium: it then ceases to be a 'borrowing' of a technique and becomes an extension of the possibilities of the medium, stimulated, of course, by developments outside.

Let us take just one example: the possibility of reversing or chang-

ing the time order. Scientific theories offered two concepts of the movement of time: on the one hand time as 'continuous flow' and on the other as a sequence of discrete particles or 'quanta'. But if time could be thought of in terms of separate particles, could these particles be arranged in different orders to provide new temporal arrangements? Could we go on with such rearrangement to the point of a complete reversal of the time order—the reversal of the order of causality? While such speculation was going on, psychological study was in the process of showing us that the time order of experience was sometimes the reverse of the historical order which, so we were being persuaded, was also the order of causality. With these concepts and theories before him, it was possible for the novelist to proceed further. Various avenues were open before him: he could jump forward on his own, he could observe what other novelists proceeding from the same point were doing; he could venture further afield and look beyond his own medium—observe and study other art-forms in a comparable predicament or dealing with similar situations. With such options available, some novelists proceeded to concretise the scientists' hypotheses and explored the field of science fantasy and fiction. Herbert George Wells wrote an account of a scientific invention in which one could travel forward or backward in time. This was not an extension or development of the novel as an art form; it was only a projection of scientific concepts into the field of fantasy without any significant experimentation in the novel itself. There was an adventure with ideas but the mode of presentation did not transgress conventional paths. Other novelists were stimulated by the challenge of these new concepts to a different kind of adventure: they sought to transform the medium itself. Instead of going into the field of fantasy they invented new techniques for presenting reality. This was not merely a projection of scientific hypotheses into the area of imaginative writing but a new development in the medium, an invention designed to meet the challenge of science and its effects on our experience of reality itself. A parallel challenge came from the cinematic medium. One could describe the process a little more elaborately and say that the discoveries of science presented parallel challenges to the cinema; that the cinema, reacting as an art medium, developed certain techniques for presenting an altered reality; that techniques parallel to those appeared in the novel as an art-form; finally, there was interaction between the two art forms which collaborated, supported and drew sustenance from each other.

An example might again be useful. The novelist was aware that time in experience moved at a varied pace, at times very fast and at others very slow; that apparently simple events could in reality be so complex and so intense that the characters involved in them would be reacting simultaneously at many levels; that, on the other hand, an event, however complicated it might seem, might in reality be of significance only on one level; that in such a case, even if it was necessary to present the total consciousness of the character involved, the significant layer would have to be singled out or presented in such a way that it highlighted itself. (Notice that 'highlight' itself is a metaphor taken from a photographic technique.) Being aware of this aspect of our time experience, the novelist was looking for language techniques to record and communicate them. The same problem existed for the cinema, but the visual medium had an answer: action could be speeded up or slowed down or even frozen by slowing down or speeding up the camera. 'Slow motion', 'speed-up', 'freeze action' were all names of technical devices evolved by the cinema. It was from the cinema that they spread to the fictional medium which developed verbal or linguistic analogues of its own.

Could there be any literary or language form, parallel to these cinematic techniques, which the novel could have used? Novelists were dealing with these problems directly. They were also stimulated by techniques evolved by the cinematic form to create and develop equivalents in their own form. There is as yet no reason to assume that the only way open to the novelist in one language was to adopt the techniques used by novelists in another more advanced language. Such an assumption becomes even more untenable when the novelist was continuously exposed to the cinematic medium. We should also bear in mind the rapid and tremendous growth of the cinema in India. There was no question of the novelist being unaware of, or unable or unwilling to utilize, parallel techniques evolving in media other than those of fiction, particularly the cinema, and also the new technical devices becoming available as a result of the interaction of these developments in the different media. Contemporary drama and modern dance also provide examples of direct adoption of technical devices made available by the cinema. In short, there was no reason why a novelist should tie his own hands and wait for other novelists to do something, when he could use various techniques offered by several media.

Naturally, it is not only the novelist of whom this is true. New relationships with time, new techniques for recording the passage of

time as well as the experience of time, were developing in all art-forms. It was not that the new awareness of time—awareness of the fragmentation, distortion, deviation, reversal or multi-dimensional scattering of time—was reflected only in the fictional form of the novel or the short story; it was reflected also in the graphic and even the plastic arts. Surrealism in art had its counterpart in the surrealist novel and the surrealist cinema: there was continuous interaction between these several art-forms.

The extension of cinematic devices was not limited to the novel or the narrative form. They affected poetry too—and not only what is called 'experimentalist' poetry. This, again, is as true in India as anywhere else: the interaction was not limited to what is generally termed experimentalist poetry and considered to be 'European-oriented'. Even in a poem like *Ram ki Shakti-puja* by Nirala, which has come to be regarded as a contemporary classic, we can see how the movement of time is controlled through devices which, once recognized, tend to be regarded as 'cinematic', and which we know by names taken from the jargon of the cinema. *Ram ki Shakti-puja* will provide examples of various cinematic devices for the control of space—'distancing—'long shot', 'medium shot', 'close-up' etc.; as well as for controlling the movement of time—such as 'slow motion' and 'freeze'.

(For those who derive satisfaction from such analysis, it may also be pointed out that the long poem *Asadhya Vina* by Ajneya also offers examples of technical devices for controlling space and time which are generally regarded as 'cinematic' devices. For example, one could ask why the poem ends the way it ends: could it not have ended two lines earlier, or again some six or seven lines earlier? Isn't the answer to be found in the necessity of distancing—in time as well as in space?)

The problem of the novel, indeed the problem of all literature, is not merely the presentation of reality, but the creation of reality—the creation of artistic reality and communication of the created reality. Realism in its proper perspective provided one formulation of the perpetual problem of the writer and offered one solution; but beyond the limits of its rationale it became a prejudice or a campaign slogan which had a self-defeating effect. It presented the problem of art in a simplistic and therefore a distorted formulation. The problem of realism is not merely one of capturing or mirroring an external reality; it is really a problem of creating an artistic reality; and of a live

communication of that creative reality. We can only correctly understand the development of the art of fiction in the light of this realization; only in that light can we understand the problem of presenting or communicating reality and the experience of reality.

When the old fabulist or the 'teller of tales' wove a tale round a moral or a precept, it was not the events of a narrative which constituted reality for him; the reality consisted in the column of the law which was the *axis mundi*, the hub round which the entire story revolved. It was to present the dominant reality of this axis of the law, to make it communicable, that he wove a tale. He made no claims of factuality for the events he narrated; his claim of reality was limited to and centred on the hub of cosmic order, the column of the law, the moral truth round which everything revolved. In the age of the moral tale also, reality was only claimed for the moral truth which was the ground of all existence. Recognition of that moral truth was the recognition of reality.

In the mediaeval age fictional narrative and romance broke away from this ground of reality and concerned itself with entertainment: the pleasing story for which the story-teller needed to look around him. This new reality with which he concerned himself was narrow, circumscribed, and one-sided; such also was the fictional literature he produced. Despite this, it was realistic literature of a sort in so far as it provides a plausible enough picture of the life and manners of a section of the society of the time. We might have found—perhaps we could yet find—another equally plausible picture of another section of the same society in the same age if we could have access to the oral literature of that period. In other words, there were two (or more) literary streams in the middle ages, presenting two (or more) parallel realities; if we could reach the literature of these parallel streams, we could make parallel voyages to map out the full reality of the period and the society concerned. This would yet be a fictive reality: because only that can have artistic validity: the basic difference between 'historic' and creative reality cannot be ignored without damage to both.

Today the area of information is vastly enlarged and our sense of reality has also extended. But since we broke away, in mediaeval times, from the religious and moral ground of experience, and literature began to move in a particular direction, we have continued to move forward in that direction. Our reality today is predominantly, almost totally, the material reality; indeed it tends to be limited to that part of material reality which is governed by the

economic condition. But it remains true that despite its vast extent, it is only a part of reality.

It is not, however, our object here to go into a philosophical examination of reality; we have limited ourselves to an exploration of the problems of creative or literary presentation of that reality, and a survey of the techniques evolved for the resolution of those problems in so far as they involve the time-experience. It is to be hoped that this task has in some measure been fulfilled.



## Time's Hunt

I am grateful for the invitation which brought me here. I am not in the main building on the hill—the Château it might have been called, or perhaps just the House—nor do I regret not having been put up there. Indeed had that happened, I might possibly not have been as free and at peace as I am here in this little, clean, undecorated, new game-keeper's lodge, way down on the slope of the hill, and almost touching the edge of the forest. After all it was the attraction of wandering in the extensive woods that brought me here. Otherwise the information that the entire area had once been a large hunting forest used on rare occasions by pleasure-loving lords and ladies who would arrive with their retinue and settle in the commodious Château on the hill in pursuit of game, exercise, pleasure and revelry all combined, would hardly have interested me enough. Now there are no hunts. Once in a while a lone hunter might turn up for a day or two of pleasure and return more than content with a week-end of effort if he bagged a deer or a couple of wild rabbits. The forest must once again be full of deer, I thought to myself. I can hardly imagine any dynamic image more beautiful than a leaping stag in the open forest; but this too is the attraction of a walk in the woods, not of the luxuriant fittings of the Château.

—But if one doesn't in life generally get what one sets out hoping for, it also sometimes happens that he receives an unimagined and unhoped-for gift. After two long walks in the forest, I wandered into the Château out of sheer curiosity and have just returned with such an unexpected present. It could seem to some that it is not a gift to have been handed a Pandora's Box of questions. But I have always believed that it is one of life's greatest achievements to have arrived at the right, or at least significant and stimulating—questions. Besides, how can one dismiss as insignificant the experiences that prompted the inquiries, specially when he is intensely aware that they have

This book did not appear to need a preface; but the following essay, translated from the Hindi book *Samvatsara* might be a useful extension as well as an illustration of some of the ideas presented in the book.

enriched his inner world? All that can be said is that these gifts are invisible rather than material: but the real gift is never the material object—it is rather the prospect of enjoyment or the extension of one's capacity for such enjoyment stemming from it. It is in this sense that a gift is a 'present'.

—The lords of the hill have been long gone. The Château, hereditary residence of generations of lords, has been sold by the heirs to a rich merchant in the city. They have themselves gone to settle in some distant town where their family name might itself be used as capital and where people would not be unduly curious about the origin of their fluid wealth. But I am not really concerned with the fortunes of the lords and their heirs and their money transactions. I am happy with the opportunity of seeing the inside of the Château through the kindness of a relation of the present owner, the rich merchant in the city. This relation is given the privilege of sometimes offering hospitality for short visits to the hill and the forest, and acquaintances to whom this hospitality is extended get the additional benefit of a tour of the Château. After all the big house has to be aired every now and then!

—The lords of the hill have been long gone. The heirs have sold the Château to a rich merchant in the city.

—On every wall in every room in the Château are hung large pictures of the hunt. The lords are dead and gone; but on the walls of the Château four hunters are still taking aim and firing at a wounded stag: for eighty years the bleeding stag has been hanging on that wall dying. His head and horns as well as the head and horns of his young have been mounted as trophies and are displayed above the picture: they stare with unfeeling glass eyes at his being thus surrounded and killed by the huntsmen—for the last eighty years he has been dying thus helplessly. In another picture the hounds are tearing at a wounded boar while one huntsman is trying to keep the dogs at bay and spear the boar. This painting is a hundred and twenty-five years old. For a century and a quarter the hounds have been tearing at the boar and the huntsman trying to spear him; after spearing the boar he will carry him, probably on his shoulder, to the pit where the lords and their guests will celebrate around his roasting carcass.

—In another painting the trapped fox is swinging from the trap, its body contorted in the final agony of dying. The fox too has been hanging thus for a century and a quarter, its body convulsing thus till death should finally release it from its torture.

—There is a host of other paintings and sketches. Every hall, room and corridor is in fact a picture gallery in which the glazed or glazing eyes of hunted animals look down upon the visitor in a fixed unblinking stare: they have been staring thus for eighty, a hundred, a hundred and twenty-five years.

—The lords and their guests who enjoyed these paintings are long dead and gone; the Château has been sold to the rich merchant in the city.

—People ask which side one is on: who is with the lords of the hunt, who with the merchant who bought the Château out of accumulated wealth, who with the huntsmen, the attendants, the peasants and the serfs who will carry the carcasses or skin the animals, who with the pursued and exploited stags, boars, foxes, hares and rabbits who have been hanging on the wall for eighty years, a century, a century and a quarter, convulsing in death.

—They are right to ask; the questions are reasonable enough in their contexts. But for him who writes there are other questions besides these. And for this, if for no other reason, because whichever side he is on, he cannot abandon anyone in the moment of suffering. Because if he did so, he would slowly lose his grip on the significance of human experience. And for him all these additional questions are as inescapable.

—What is that in which the lords died, the merchant bought the Château, the serfs were pressed into labour, the animals suffered—in which the questioners posed their questions, and *in which I live?*

—Time! But are all these times the one same time—the time in which the lords died, in which serfs ran, the boars were convulsed and in which I live?

—And then the moment of emotional shock when I first entered the Château, first saw the pictures: in my experience it was in that moment that the stags died, the boars convulsed with agony; even the eighty, hundred, hundred and twenty-five years passed in that moment; in reality the pictured events themselves occurred in that moment and it is only through (the prejudice of) some previously gathered information that I have been able to set up a distance of time between those events and my experience. This distance on the one hand protects me against the experiential authenticity of the experience itself, on the other hand it gives it a historical authenticity, strengthening and modifying it through the evidence of all my experiences, their consecutiveness and the measure of the intervals between them—the intervals which, by providing a continuity or

sense of duration for my experience of shock, also provide a continuity, within a given frame, to the dying of the lords, the agony of the boars and the travail of the serfs.

—And then this time in which you will be reading this account and in which all these events will occur in your experience, in occurrence find a continuity and duration—all of which, in this moment of my writing, *is yet to happen* ... The lords will die, the boars will convulse with agony, the serfs will run, I shall look at the pictures and feel the shock and ask questions which you . . .

Time: the experience . . .

—Continuity—duration: the historical duration of having been dead, the existential duration of being alive; and then this—this realistic duration of being pictured dying, in which the flow of time has frozen . . .

—But—*frozen*? When I thus illuminate it before you, does it not break into waves within you? What is still is the ultimate source of all movement, and what is in motion the permanent image of the unending stillness . . . And the *formulation in experience* of this dynamic inter-penetration is the enduring challenge which the creative artist must face unendingly.



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